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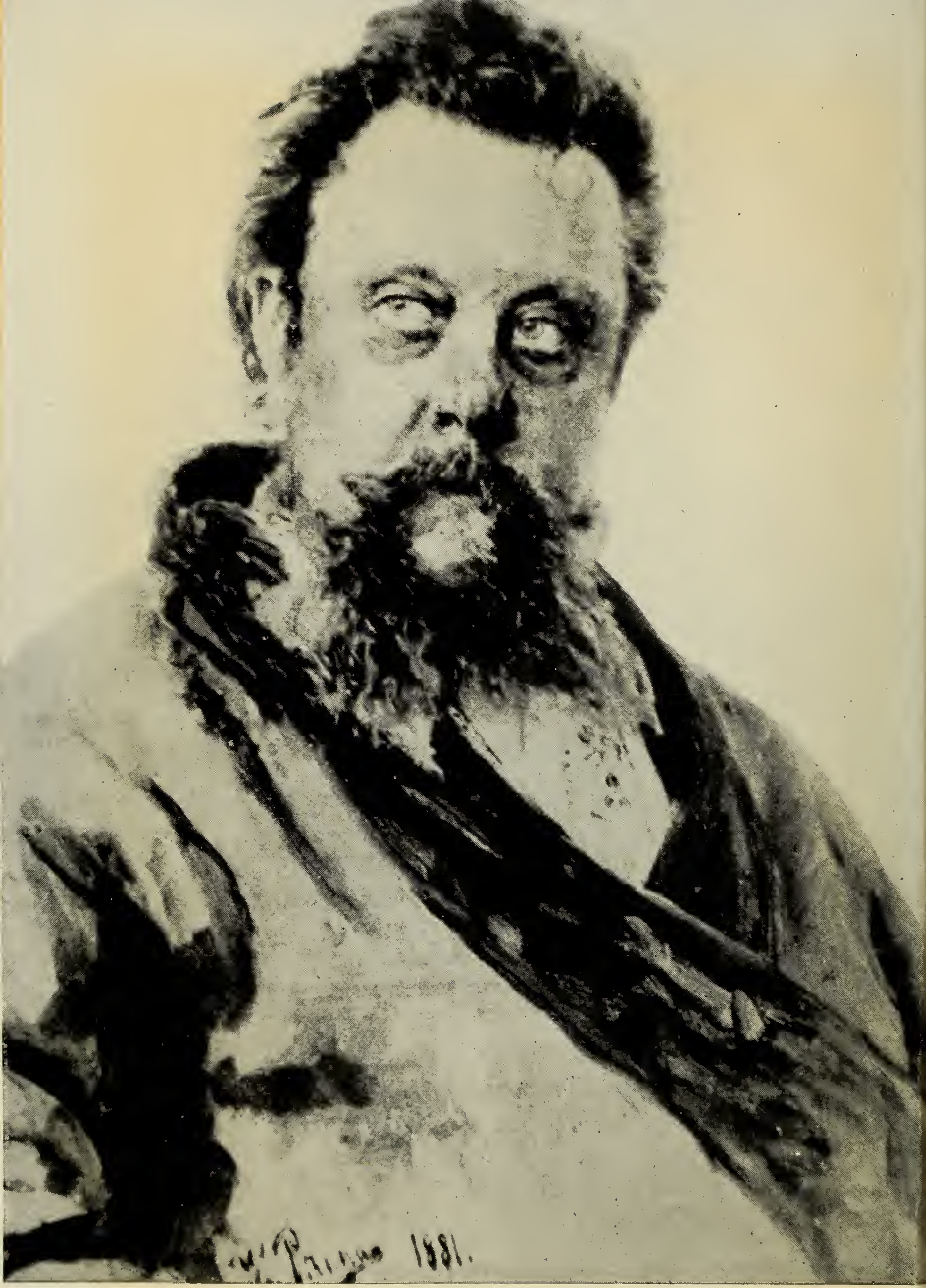

Modest Mussorgsky

MODEST
MUSSORGSKY
His Life and Works

by

M. D. CALVOCORESSI

1956
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BY

THE AUTHOR

The superior figures in the text refer to the bibliography on p. 308

FOREWORD

THE tale of what happened to the manuscript of this book should, I think, be told. It had been commissioned by Kussevitsky for 1924, but in 1925 my husband learned that Professor Lamm was preparing to publish the full genuine text of 'Boris Godunof' and subsequently of all Mussorgsky's other works, and this entailed much writing and rewriting of the book over many years. It was finished in 1938, while people were being hastily fitted with gas-masks and shelters were being built. The manuscript was sent to Paris, where Kussevitsky had his publishing firm, and there it stayed all during the war without our knowing if it was safe.

My husband died on February 1st, 1944. Kussevitsky died later and then followed the collapse of this firm after the war. Meanwhile Francis Poulenc, when visiting London, kindly promised to find out about the fate of the manuscript, which he most happily did. After the war came paper-rationing and other difficulties; that chapter is ended. But I cannot close this brief note without expressing my heartfelt gratitude to our friend Professor Gerald Abraham for his wonderful kindness in seeing this book through the press from a written manuscript, as my husband did not type.

My thanks are also due to Mr. Basil Bessel for permission to reprint numerous excerpts from music of which he holds the copyright.

Chelsea, 1956 ETHEL CALVOCORESSI

IT should perhaps be made clear that the present book, Calvocoressi's *magnum opus* on the composer in whom he was interested above all others, is quite distinct from the two others he published on Mussorgsky, and is in no respect a revision or expansion of them. The first, written in French and published in 1908 (a defective English version appeared in 1919), was long accepted as a standard work; but, valuable as it was, it dated from a period when—as the author was the first to point out—Mussorgsky's original texts were largely unknown. The history of the second, the present work and the largest, has been told above by Mrs. Calvocoressi. The third, commissioned during the war by Messrs. J. M. Dent for their well-known 'Master Musicians' series, was planned on a much smaller scale and was still sadly incomplete when Calvocoressi died; the honour and responsibility of finishing it fell on me; it was published in 1946. But whereas in that case I was obliged to edit, recast, and supply missing passages on a major scale, my editorial work on the present book has been limited to the minimum involved in the operation known as 'seeing through the press'.

Liverpool, 1956 GERALD ABRAHAM

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

TO write, at thirty-one years interval, two books on the same composer is bound to be a strange experience:* but, given the particular circumstances of the Mussorgsky case, it becomes overwhelmingly strange. I did not find it at all strange that my further study of his music should have confirmed me in convictions that I had expressed from the first—although not forcibly and unreservedly enough, the reason being that, at the time, I could not bring myself to believe the many experienced judges who expatiated so freely on the crudeness and clumsiness of his methods to have been entirely wrong. But this is not the main thing. That my early book in French (written in 1907, published in the spring of 1908) should have been hinted, even in Russia, as representing a distinct advance on anything done before is to be regarded as a proof not so much of its merits as of the scarcity of literature on the subject, and even of reliable information. No reasonably adequate catalogue of Mussorgsky's works had been compiled, the biographies in existence were scanty and at times misleading. Vladimir Stassof, whose brief biography of 1881[1] was the main source of reference available, possessed an enormous amount of invaluable first-hand information: but published very little of it, and used some of it (for instance, the autobiographical notes—see chapter I) misleadingly. Later he communicated some of it to Nikolai Findeisen: and a good deal lay in his correspondence with Balakiref, Rimsky-Korsakof, and others, unpublished at that time, and not yet published in full. Hardly anything was known of Mussorgsky's own letters. Certain documents already in print—notably Kompaneisky's Recollections, which show, among other things, the origin of his dipsomania (see chapter II)—had appeared in 1906.[2] But no file of the *Russian Musical Gazette* existed in France. Of the genuine *Boris Godunof*, nothing was available except the 1874 vocal score.

But, from 1908 on, a wealth of new texts and information began to crop up. The score of *The Marriage* appeared that year. In 1909 came Rimsky-Korsakof's Memoirs and the important manuscript *Years of Youth*, purchased by Charles Malherbe, and containing many unknown songs and variants of known songs. Mussorgsky's letters to Stassof and to Balakiref appeared 1909–1911.[2] In short by 1911, when a second edition was called for, my book was hopelessly out of date. The publisher agreed to relax the rule that no volume in the series of which mine was part should exceed 250 pages (a rule which had compelled me to suppress a chapter devoted to a comparison between the 1874 vocal score of *Boris Godunof* and Rimsky-Korsakof's revision), but only to the extent of allowing me to add a brief notice of *The Marriage* and a note on *Years of Youth.*

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* Still later the author began a third, much shorter, study of Mussorgsky; this was far from complete at his death and was finished by Gerald Abraham (Dent, 1946).

Forthwith I started planning another, more comprehensive book. In 1912 Serge Makovsky, the proprietor and editor of the splendid art periodical *Apollon*, commissioned this for publication in St. Petersburg. The war naturally put an end to the scheme and my plans remained dormant until the 1920s, when Serge Kussevitsky invited me to proceed with them.

By that time it seemed reasonable to hope that a fairly adequate biographical and criticial study could be achieved, even though many important materials (neither I nor anybody else realized how many) were still undiscovered or inaccessible. But in 1925 the news came that Professor Paul Lamm of Moscow had begun to prepare a complete critical edition of the works. The first-fruit of his labours, the genuine *Boris Godunof* including the full score and all discoverable variants, appeared in 1928. It was also announced that several important books[3, 4] would appear in 1931, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of Mussorgsky's death. And so, from then until 1938, my work proceeded very much after the fashion of Penelope's tapestry, with long intervals of waiting in between. By now, thanks to the splendid work accomplished in Russia, it seems unlikely that any musical compositions or documents shedding entirely new light upon Mussorgsky remain to be discovered, even though a number of letters of his not yet published are known to exist. So I release my work at long last, wondering the while how much time will elapse before points that are still obscure will finally be elucidated.

The foregoing remarks make clear how much I owe to my Russian colleagues. I gratefully acknowledge my indebtedness, first and foremost to the late Nikolai Findeisen, the founder and editor of the *Russian Musical Gazette*. In 1912 he provided me with a wealth of precious documents, most of them published by now, together with many others,[3] at the time practically impossible to locate, let alone procure; and he continued to help me until his untimely death in 1926, at the age of fifty-six. Then, to Andreï Rimsky-Korsakof, whose scholarship and untiring willingness to assist have been invaluable, and whose own contributions to the literature of the subject, from his essay (1917) on *Boris Godunof* in the *Musical Contemporary*, which he founded in 1915, to his edition of the collected letters,[4] are of capital importance. The latter, a monument of scholarship and industry, filled many gaps and spared me (as it will spare other workers) many doubts and investigations.

The temptation to translate the whole, or nearly all, of the letters was great, and I have no doubt that permission would have been generously granted. The idea, however, proved impossible to entertain as it would have meant a considerable increase in the bulk of this book.*

For the same reason, I compressed all my quotations from letters and other documents as much as it seemed possible to do without altering their purport. As to the character of Mussorgsky's own letters, it would have been impossible not to alter it:

> He was fond of imitating the style of the clerics and officials whom he depicted in *Boris* and *Khovanshchina*. He resorted freely to pseudo-archaic and pseudo-slavic terms, and also to imitation of the modes of speech of characters in Dostoevsky's novels. In his correspondence we see him assuming no less than four distinct aspects: that of a seventeenth-century cleric, that of an eighteenth-century scholar, that of a brilliant officer of the Guards and that of a pitiful childlike figure.
>
> Being fond of masquerading, he was equally fond of bestowing nicknames upon friends and foes—sometimes, according to his mood of the moment, an affectionate or a malicious nickname upon the same man. His humour often inclined to the caricatural, the parodic, and the grotesque. His way of writing is so live and impetuous that often it suggests his very intonations, facial expressions and gestures. He could use vivid images to good purpose, and be extraordinarily live, bright, original and forcible. But at times, he indulged in short cuts, jerks and sudden leaps that rendered the trend of his utterances difficult to follow.

---

* They have since been translated by Jay Leyda and Sergei Bertensson as *The Mussorgsky Reader* (Norton, New York, 1947); this collection also includes the letters to Golenishchef-Kutuzof originally published separately in 1939.—Ed.

Much of this was not peculiar to Mussorgsky, but quite usual in the group.[3] Nikolsky's style in his letters is very similar. Many of the nicknames used in conversation or in correspondence were invented by one member, Nikolai Borozdin. Vladimir Stassof's letters to Rimsky-Korsakof often begin with superscriptions such as "Most splendid [or "excellent" or "beautiful"] admiralship" by way of allusion to the composer's service in the navy, and his letters to Nadejda Rimsky-Korsakof with "Madame l'Admirale". One letter begins with "First and foremost of all Andreivitchs and Nikolais", which is as exuberantly frolicsome as anything ever written by Mussorgsky. Rimsky-Korsakof did not unbend so freely; but, once at least, he addressed Stassof as "Very respected, deeply honoured et cetera Vladimir Vassilievitch", and once he offered him "ten thousand quadrillion thanks" (a 1 followed by twenty-nine cyphers) for having checked a translation of the opera *Sadko*. Borodin, in his letters to his wife, used over half-a-hundred pet-names or nicknames for her, some of them most cryptic and strange. So, before any attempt is made to draw any psychological conclusions from Mussorgsky's correspondence, the circumstances of the case should be very carefully investigated.

I have seldom attempted to reproduce any of the above-mentioned idiosyncrasies. My own feeling is that they connote animal spirits rather than peculiarities in his mental make-up. And, anyhow, anyone wishful to study the style of his letters for ulterior purposes would naturally be bound to deal with them in the original Russian, and in full. While I am on the subject of the liberties I have taken, I should perhaps offer some kind of apology for having introduced into musical terminology the term 'variable scale'. I am not unaware that it is customary to speak of major or minor scales with occasional raised or flattened notes, or of fusion of major and minor, and so on: but the more I study Russian (and Greek) folk-music and Mussorgsky's music, the more strongly I feel that those designations do not meet the case—a view that the examples in my chapters on Mussorgsky's style will, I hope, justify.

To revert to tributes: I offer my hearty thanks to Professors Igor Gliebof, Victor Belaief, Paul Lamm and George Khubof for valuable information and suggestions; and to my wife, not only for reading and checking my manuscript, but also for help in solving delicate problems of wording and, most of all, for a number of ideas and arguments incorporated in my account of Mussorgsky's character, life and music.

I have tried, when making points already made by other writers, always to acknowledge my indebtedness. Should I unwittingly have failed to do so now and then, I apologize in advance.

M. D. C.

Chelsea,
November, 1938

CONTENTS

Page

Foreword vii

Author's Preface ix

List of Illustrations xix

Chapter

i The Autobiographical Documents 1
The autobiographical sketches—How they came into being—Their untrustworthiness—Scarcity of information on Mussorgsky's childhood—His catalogues of his works

ii Ancestry, Childhood, Early Youth 12
Mussorgsky's ancestry and family—Childhood in Karevo—School years in Petersburg—Disastrous atmosphere and influences—Musical Petersburg in the 'fifties—Mussorgsky meets Dargomyjsky, Borodin, Balakiref, and Cui

iii 1857—1862 27
Mussorgsky becomes Balakiref's pupil—Studies and exercises—First compositions—Illness—Resigns his commission to become a composer—Visits to Moscow—Morbid crisis—Mussorgsky at twenty—New outbreak of illness—His prospects altered after the liberation of the serfs—Cure and stay in the country—His ideas and plans

iv Mussorgsky in 1862 46
His talents, character, and disposition—His immaturity in composition—Early works surveyed—Dissimilar versions of songs

v 1863-1867 57
Mussorgsky matures—Joins a community—Enters the civil service—Starts composing *Salammbô*—Attack of delirium tremens and cure—New friendships—Disquisition on art—Significant compositions—Estrangement from Balakiref

vi Mussorgsky at the End of 1867 81
Significance of his songs—His realistic aims—Definition

Chapter *Page*

of realism in art—The stages of realism in music—Mussorgsky finds himself under the influence of literary and philosophical ideas

vii 1868 96

Mussorgsky sets to music an act of Gogol's comedy *The Marriage*—His enthusiasms—His decision not to proceed further—His dissertations on aesthetics—The music of *The Marriage*—Life with the Opotchinins—Pen-portraits by friends—Starts work on *Boris Godunof*

viii 1869-1872 115

Work on *Boris Godunof*—The first version—Its rejection—The second version—It is rejected too—Life with Rimsky-Korsakof—*Mlada*—Close friendship with Vladimir Stassof—First idea of *Khovanshchina*

ix 1873 129

Mussorgsky falls a prey to dipsomania—His friends' concern and efforts—He recovers—*Boris* accepted for performance

x The First *Boris Godunof* 137

Mussorgsky works at great speed—The first version completed—The libretto—The music—His friends' attitude to the work—Its rejection compels him to remodel it

xi 1872-1873 157

The second *Boris Godunof*—What Mussorgsky may have felt about it—He waxes enthusiastic—The new *Boris* cuts; added scenes; character of the work altered—Comparison of the two versions—His friends enthusiastic—Balakiref's censures—*Boris* again rejected—Excerpts performed in February 1873—Success and criticisms—*Boris* accepted at last

xii *Boris Godunof* on the Stage 174

The Petersburg Opera and its public—*Boris* splendidly produced but ruthlessly cut—Its triumphal success—Hostile critics—Cui's attack—History of *Boris* until Mussorgsky's death—Further cuts

xiii 1874-1881 182

The *Pictures from an Exhibition*—The work on *Khovanshchina* and *The Sorotchintsi Fair*—Nadejda Opotchinina's death—Leonova—Mussorgsky unable to resist his dipsomania—Ups and downs—The song-set *Sunless*—Fresh disquisitions on art—The Naumof family—Decline in his capacity for work—Money difficulties increase—Concert tour with Leonova—Help from

Chapter *Page*

friends—He vainly tries to work at both his operas jointly—Final collapse and death

xiv *Khovanshchina* and *The Sorotchintsi Fair* 211

Khovanshchina nearly finished in vocal score form—Lack of dramatic action—Main differences between the music and that of *Boris Godunof*—The existing portions of *The Sorotchintsi Fair*

xv Posthumous Fate of the Works 215

Rimsky-Korsakof as editor and reviser—The revisions versus the originals—A history of opinion in Russia and other countries—Gradual reaction in favour of the originals

xvi Technique and Style (I) 234

Influence of Russian folk-music—Its modes, scales, and rhythms—Native part-singing—Harmonization problems—The question of Mussorgsky's technical ability and musical feeling.

xvii Technique and Style (II) 254

Relation of Mussorgsky's music to Russian folk-music—Modal, irregular, and variable scales—Metres and rhythms—Realism and music-shaping—Note-values and intervals—Syllabic and non-syllabic treatment—Scarcity of upbeats, feminine endings, and syncopation—Musical finger-prints—Interrelation of melody and harmony—Harmony: consecutives and discords—Appoggiaturas and pedal-points—Scarcity of suspensions—Polyphony—Cadences and modulations

xviii Technique and Style (III) 290

Forms—Keys—Tonality and modality—Tonal plans and structure—Vocal and instrumental parts—Instrumental style

xix A Few Conclusions 302

Artistic heredity—The question of style—Influence on the ulterior course of musical art—Ever-increasing recognition of the artistic value of Mussorgsky's works

Key to Bibliographical Sources 308

Catalogue of Mussorgsky's Works 310

General Index 314

Index to Musical Examples 322

ILLUSTRATIONS

MODEST MUSSORGSKY — *Frontispiece*
From the painting by Repin

RIMSKY-KORSAKOF — *facing page* 92

MILY BALAKIREF — 93

CÉSAR CUI — 108
From a drawing by Repin

BORODIN — 109

MUSICAL AUTOGRAPH BY BORODIN — 109

CORONATION SCENE FROM *BORIS GODUNOF* — 220
Setting by P. Williams

COSTUME DESIGNS BY LÉON BAKST FOR *BORIS GODUNOF* — 221
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CHAPTER I

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL DOCUMENTS

The autobiographical sketches—How they came into being—Their untrustworthiness—Scarcity of information on Mussorgsky's childhood—His catalogues of his works

THE first documents with which Mussorgsky's biographers have to deal are a few from his own pen: two catalogues of his compositions, one of which contains scraps of useful information, and autobiographical sketches written in 1880—rough, unfinished drafts, which Vladimir Stassof used, not very scientifically, as early as 1881[1] but which remained otherwise unknown until 1917, when they were published with valuable comments by Vladimir Karenin.* Text and comments, together with a wealth of fresh information were reprinted in 1932 by Andreï Rimsky-Korsakof.[4] These documents contain all that we are able to know about Mussorgsky's childhood and early youth, except for the meagre information provided by his brother Philaret and Alexandra Molas.

The sketches are three in number: one in Russian, two in French. One of these two is simply a copy, with corrections, of the other; and the French text is no translation of the Russian, but contains interesting complements and variants. Karenin's conclusion is that this French text was dictated or simply outlined by Mussorgsky and drawn up by a German—which is shown by the incorrect diction and the use of many hyperbolic epithets. There are quite as many hyperbolic epithets in the Russian text which, in Andreï Rimsky-Korsakof's opinion, is very similar in character to that of Mussorgsky's letters of the same period, and especially those written to Fedorova and the Naumofs in July and August 1879.

Here is the translation of the Russian text, with the principal complements and variants to be found in the French as published by Karenin. Erased portions are given in square brackets:

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* Vladimir Karenin was the pen-name of Varvara Komarova, the daughter of Dimitri Stassof, Vladimir's brother.[17]

Modest [Petr] Mussorgsky. Russian Composer. Born March 16* 1839, in the Toropets district, government of Pskof. A scion of an old Russian family. Under the influence of his nurse, he became familiar with the Russian tales.† This familiarity with the very spirit of the people's life was the main impulse that drove him to extemporize music before knowing even the most elementary rules of piano playing. His mother gave him his first piano lessons.‡ He made such progress that at the age of seven, he was able to play small pieces of Liszt; and at the age of nine, before a big audience, at his parents' home, he played a big concerto by Field. His father, who worshipped music, decided that the child's gifts should be developed—and his musical education was continued under Herke at Petersburg. This teacher was so pleased with his pupil that he made him play, at the age of twelve, a Concert Rondo by Herz at a charity concert given at the house of Mrs. Riumin, a lady-in-waiting. The success and the impression created by the young musician's playing were so great that Professor Herke, although an exacting judge of his pupils, presented him with a copy of Beethoven's Sonata in A flat major. At thirteen, young Mussorgsky entered the school of the Cadets of the Guards, and was honoured by the late Emperor Nicholas's particularly gracious notice. At that time, he composed a small piano piece and inscribed it to his comrades. This was published by his father's orders with Herke's help. It was the young [gifted] composer's first published composition. At the school, he sedulously sought the company of the religious instructor, Father Krupsky, and thanks to him succeeded in penetrating deep into the very essence of old church music, Greek§ and Catholic.

At seventeen, he entered the Preobrajensky regiment. One of his brother officers, Vanliarsky, introduced him to the great Dargomyjsky|| at whose house he made friends with the great representatives of musical art in Russia, César Cui and Balakiref.¶ With the latter the nineteen-year-old composer studied the whole history of the evolution of musical art, from actual examples and with strictly systematic analyses of all the

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* It was in 1911 only that B. Tiutchef discovered the true date of Mussorgsky's birth: not 16/28 March but 9/21 March (see *infra*, p. 13).

† In the French: "Dès sa petite enfance, influé de par les récits de sa bonne (*niania*) des skaski russes (*märchen*) il a déjà fièrement sympathisé à la poétique fantaisie; tout enfant encore, il veillait peut-être des nuits. De là vient naître la passion de dire au monde en sons musicaux le *tout* de l'homme, pour l'incorporer en formes musicales, ni plus ni moins! Le petit a attaqué le piano à l'improviste, sans même, comme de raison, avoir eu la possibilité de connaître l'A.B.C. ni le mécanisme. . . ."

‡ In the French: "Leçons durant il n'a pu supporter ce qu'on lui prescrivait. Néanmoins. . . ."

§ In the French: " luthérienne-protestante".

|| In the French: "le grand réformateur en musique".

¶ In the French: " le grand coeur et le grand esprit de Balakireff ont fait ressusciter Moussorgsky pour aller 'à large pâture'. Sous la direction de Balakireff Moussorgsky a étudié sérieusement l'histoire de l'art musical, avec analyse. . . ."

capital works of Europe's composers in their historical order, and sedulous playing of these works on two pianos.* Balakiref introduced him into the family of one of the greatest connoisseurs of the arts in Russia, the famous art critic Stassof, and to the sister of [the famous] the genius, Glinka, the creator of Russian music. Cui, on the other hand, introduced Mussorgsky to the famous Polish composer Moniuszko. Soon afterwards, Mussorgsky made friends with another distinguished composer, now a famous professor at the Petersburg Conservatorium, N. A. Rimsky-Korsakof. These close relations with this little circle of talented musicians, and also with a wide circle of Russian scholars and authors, such a Vladimir Lamansky, Turgenief, Kostomarof, Grigorovitch, Kavelin, Pissemsky, Shevtchenko† and others, greatly stimulated the young composer's mental activities and gave his mind an earnest, strictly scientific turn. The results of these felicitous relations were a whole series of compositions inspired by the life of the Russian people‡ and a friendship struck at Mrs. Shestakova's house with Professor V. Nikolsky led to the composition of the grand opera *Boris Godunof* after the great Pushkin's play. *Boris Godunof* was performed at the house of the privy councillor Purgold, a great art-lover, with the co-operation of his nieces A. and N. Purgold, both of them earnest, gifted performers, and before a very big audience, including the famous Petrof, Platonova, Komissarjevsky, and the assistant of the director Lukashevitch. Then it was forthwith decided to produce on the stage three scenes from this opera, although not long before the opera had been rejected by the Direction of the theatres. And so, finally, the whole opera was produced with the co-operation of the famous singer Leonova and of the above-named artists who gave it the support of their talent. It took the public by storm. The impression created by the artists and orchestra was prodigious and this success constituted for the author a triumph all along the line.§

Subsequently, two operas *Khovanshchina* and *The Sorotchintsi Fair* after Gogol, were planned with the co-operation of the critic Stassof and Professors Nikolsky and Kostomarof. By way of relaxation while engaged on this work Mussorgsky composed: *Album Serie* on the exhibition of the great architect Hartmann's designs, *Danse Macabre** (five numbers) on texts by another author, Count Golenishchef-Kutuzof, and a few songs on texts by Count Alexeï Tolstoi. In 1879 the famous Russian singer Leonova invited Mussorgsky to undertake a big artistic tour through Russia, Little-Russia, the Crimea and on the Don and Volga. This journey lasted three months and was a real triumphal march for the two great Russian artists: the talented composer and the famous singer.

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* At this point occur a few erased passages. Karenin reads them thus: "It is Mussorgsky and Balakiref alone who took the initiative . . . not only in making known . . . Mussorgsky and Balakiref, far more than anybody else, helped to popularize in Russia the music of Schumann, Berlioz and Liszt."

† Mussorgsky wrote down, and then struck out, the name of Dostoevsky: probably, Karenin says, because the list he was giving referred only to people he had actually met.

‡ Variant: "The result of these relations was intensive self-education in philosophy and natural history. He formed a little circle in 1860 and began to know and study literature from 1860 to 1862; the result of this mental work came to light in 1866, consisting in a series of original compositions. . . ."

§ In the French: "C'est alors que Moussorgsky a été amicalement reçu dans la famille Petroff (célèbres artistes russes); la famille Petroff a grandement donné la vraie et franche position au commençant compositeur".

On the way, the composer planned to translate into music a poem by the great Goethe which had not yet been dealt with from the musical point of view, the 'Song of Mephistopheles in the Auerbach tavern, the Flea'. Two of Mussorgsky's impressions of his journey through the Crimea have already appeared in print: the capriccios 'Baīdary' and 'Gurzuf'. He also composed and performed himself at several concerts a big tone-picture *Storm on the Black Sea.* Carrying to their end the two grand operas *Khovanshcina* and *The Sorotchintsi Fair*, which are now going through the press [which the author is preparing for the press] simultaneously with a big Suite on themes from the Transcaspian region [Central Asian themes].† A few of the most brilliantly original vocal pictures 'Savishna', 'The Orphan', 'The Rude Rascal', 'Hopak', were presented by the composer's friend Von Madeweiss, who greatly admired them, to the Strasburg library, together with a letter from the author explaining these songs.

Two Scherzi: B flat major and C sharp minor: the former was performed, A. Rubinstein, who wished the author to have a first opportunity of hearing his music, conducting the orchestra,‡ 'Impromptu', 'Prelude' and 'Menuet Monstre', 'Savishna', 'Hopak', 'Plucking Mushrooms' (words by Mey), 'Hebrew Song' for chorus and orchestra, 'The Destruction of Sennacherib' (words by Byron), 'Jesus Navinus' (on old Hebrew themes, noted down by the author), 'The Rude Rascal', 'The Grasshopper' (words by Pushkin), 'Intermezzo Symphonique', 'Kinderscherz', 'La Fileuse', 'King Saul' (after a Hebrew text), 'Hebrew Song', 'Child's Song, Nanina' (*sic*), 'Album of Child Life', 'Forgotten' (a picture of the Central-Asian campaign), 'Night Fantasy' (after Pushkin), 'Yeremushka' (words by Nekrassof), and polemical: 'The Classicist', 'The Peep-Show', 'The Seminarist', the last-named banned in Russia, circulated in many manuscript copies, published abroad.

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* In the French: 'Danse Macabre Russe'.

† This sentence is translated word for word, and the original punctuation is given.

‡ It was, Karenin affirms, entirely thanks to Dimitri Stassof's insistence that this Scherzo was performed at the Imperial Russian Music Society. Dimitri Stassof was one of the Society's founders, and at the time (1860) the director of the Petersburg section.

Neither by the character of his compositions, nor by his musical opinions does Mussorgsky belong to any of the existing circles. The formula of his artistic *profession de foi* may be made clear by his view, as a composer, on the duty of art. Art is a means of discoursing with men, and not an end. This leading principle determines all his creative activities. Starting from the conviction that human speech is governed by strictly musical laws (Virchow, Gerwinus,) he holds that the duty of musical art is to reproduce in musical tones not only the moods of human sensibility but also, generally, the moods of human speech. acknowledging that in the matter of art only reformer-artists such as Palestrina, Bach, Gluck, Beethoven, Berlioz, Liszt created laws for art, he regards such laws not as immutable, but as progressing and changing as does the whole mental world of man.

Under the influence of his views, thus evolved, on the duties and character of his work—a whole. . . .

Stassof treated these three sketches jointly as one authoritative document, never describing them, copying portions of them word for word, or almost, and making it appear that he was giving facts under his own authority. The outcome was that for forty years other biographers, who (no other source of information existing—especially as regards the childhood and early youth) naturally followed him, were misled. The revelation that the autobiography consisted of three unfinished rough drafts, in which inaccuracies and misstatements teemed, and whose tone was, in places, that of a clumsily devised and ill-written trade-circular or 'Society gossip' paragraph, came as a shock to all.

The first question that arose was how the sketches had come to be written. According to Stassof "the autobiography was intended for a foreign publisher, by request". Karenin, in 1917, surmised that the sketches might be drafts of the 'explanatory letter' brought to Strasburg. Fifteen years later, Andreï Rimsky-Korsakof provided a solution which appears faultless. He discovered, in the *Russky Muzykalny Viestnik* for 1 October 1881, a note signed "M.P." (this note is translated *infra*, p. 17) stating that Mussorgsky, shortly before his death, had told the writer of his sending to Hugo Riemann "a fairly circumstantial autobiography in French". Andreï Rimsky-Korsakof[4] adds the following remarks: "In 1880 Riemann was preparing his 'Dictionary of Music' and had sent questionnaires to musicians of all countries (a copy was found among Borodin's papers). The Dictionary appeared in 1882, and in the first edition, the brief article devoted to Mussorgsky mentions, among his works, the 'Danses Macabres Russes' of the French draft: in point of fact, the songs referred to, four in number, appeared in 1882 only under the title *Songs and Dances of Death*."

If this solution is accepted, the conclusion follows that the final text of the autobiography, if still in existence, ought to be in Riemann's archives or in those of his publisher; and the peculiar tone and character of the sketches are accounted for.

Mussorgsky, writing in 1880, at a time when he was ill, poor, vainly striving to finish *Khovanshchina* and *The Sorotchintsi Fair*, and seeing the only work of his which had won a measure of fame, *Boris Godunof*, mutilated in performance and gradually dropping out of the repertory (see *infra*, chapter XII) was not unnaturally tempted to show himself—especially when writing for publication abroad—in the best possible light; to indulge, so to speak, in a little window-dressing.

There is something very pathetic in the way in which he emphasized the success of *Boris Godunof* and the approval which some other works of his had won; in the mention of the two new operas "now going through the press" and the doubts as to how far he should anticipate the future which the crossed-out alternative version "being prepared for the press" reveals; and in the very clumsiness with which he tackled the task, new to him, of self-praise (his letters show him proud of his artistic ideals, but ever modest when referring to his achievements). And so, the sketches are of unquestionable value to the biographer for the light they throw on Mussorgsky's psychology in 1880.

They are valuable in other respects too—for the tributes paid to Dargomyjsky and Balakiref, and for his statements of his ambitions as an artist. As regards the earlier part of his life, on which we have either no other information or very scanty information, they may be accepted as fairly reliable, even though much of the account of his childhood may be no less embellished than, for instance, the reference to what he learnt from Father Krupsky turns out to be (see next chapter, p. 17). Stassof may have had from Mussorgsky oral confirmation of more statements than one.

In a letter to Nikolsky of 1870 (28 June [10 July]) the passage: "You know how great an attraction the native countryside exercises upon me. It is not in vain that as a child I found it worth my while to listen to the mujiks and to try my own hand at their songs" confirms what the sketches say of his early interest in "the spirit of the people's life". In short, the sketches should neither be accepted at their face-value nor treated with unremitting suspicion.

The following chapters will rectify, so far as is possible in the present state of our knowledge, the inaccuracies in the sketches and in the catalogues of 1871 and 1878; but a few secondary points should be dealt with forthwith. The passage concerning the gift to the Strasbourg library raised the hope that Mussorgsky manuscripts might be found there. Karenin surmised that what was given might have been the manuscript album of songs *Years of Youth* acquired by Charles Malherbe in 1909. This manuscript, however, contains none of the songs mentioned in Mussorgsky's reference to the gift. And in 1909, when the present writer examined it, the album bore no sign of library stamp or ever having been catalogued; and Malherbe told the friends to whom he showed it that he had purchased it (for the incredibly low sum of 500 francs) from a Russian living in Russia, whom he refused to name.

In 1924 the Director of the Strasburg Conservatoire, J. Guy Ropartz, very kindly undertook to investigate the matter at the present writer's request, and communicated the results as follows:

> The Strasbourg Library possesses the set of seven songs by Mussorgsky published by Johansen (the set which includes 'Hopak'). The copy bears the library's stamp with the date 1871, which shows that it was received just after the destruction by fire of the library in the Place du Marché Neuf—that is, at a moment when gifts were flowing in from everywhere. But there is no trace of a manuscript or letter of Mussorgsky's. I was told that all the correspondence referring to these gifts had been deposited in the Archives Départmentales. I went there, and found no letter of Mussorgsky's in the Russian file. I was also told that in 1871 gifts poured in so fast, that it was almost impossible to keep the tally up to date. Many things may have been lost, including, maybe, the document that would have interested you.
>
> [Signed] J. Guy Ropartz
>
> Conservatoire de Strasbourg, 31 March, 1924.

Investigations carried out, round about the same time, by Robert Godet, Mussorgsky's French biographer, and by Professor M. P. Alexeief, of Irkutsk[4] naturally failed to reveal anything further.

Very little has been discovered concerning the giver, or carrier, "Von Madeweiss". Godet[8] wonders whether he was the "hot-blooded Prussian" whom Mussorgsky encountered at Volok in 1862 (see *infra*, p. 45). Karenin (*loc. cit.*) discovered that Pazdirek's *Universal Handbook of Musical Literature* mentions a certain Georg von Madeweiss as the author of songs and piano pieces published by Schlesinger; and Andreï Rimsky-Korsakof,[4] that a piano piece by Georg von Madeweiss, entitled 'At the Sewing-machine' was published in 1880 as musical supplement to the Petersburg *Voskresny Listok Muzyki*. He also reminds us that it was in 1880 or so that Mussorgsky wrote his piano scherzino 'The Seamstress' —a curious little coincidence.

The 1871 catalogue was drawn up at Liudmila Shestakova's request (she made similar requests to Balakiref, Cui, Borodin and Rimsky-Korsakof). It was used by Stassof, but not published in full until 1932.[4]

MUSSORGSKY

His first composition (published, to his distress, by Bernard in 1852) was 'Porte-Enseigne Polka' inscribed to his comrades at the Cadet School. He was thirteen years old.

1856 Attempt to compose an opera after Victor Hugo's *Hans d'Islande*. Nothing came of it, because nothing could (the author was seventeen).

1858 Scherzi: (1) in B flat major, performed in 1860 at a concert of the Russian Music Society, A. Rubinstein conducting.
(2) C sharp minor, for piano—unpublished.
Songs: one of these, 'Tell me, gentle maiden' is published.
Started composing music for Sophocles' tragedy *Œdipus*. A chorus in the temple of the Eumenides, before Œdipus appears, was given in 1861 at one of K. Liadof's concerts.

1859 Nervous malady. Took the waters at Tikhvin in the Novgorod District, and composed 'Kinderscherz' (to appear shortly).

1860 Developed his brain.

1861 Intermezzo (to appear shortly).
Preludio in modo classico.
Menuetto.

1862 Set his brain in order and acquired useful knowledge.

1863 A few songs. One, 'King Saul', to appear shortly.

1864 Started an opera after Flaubert's *Salammbô* (on the Punic wars). At the end of the year, two scenes were finished in vocal score sketch.
'Night' (ballad fantasy) to appear shortly.

First attempt at the comic: Nekrassof's *Kallistrat.*
1865 About ten unpublished songs.
A scene of *Salammbô.*
'Lullaby' from Ostrovsky's *The Voevode* (to appear shortly).
1866 Chorus on Byron's 'Hebrew melody' *The Destruction of Sennacherib* (performed in 1867, Balakiref and Lomakin conducting at a Free School of Music concert). Published in 1871.
'Savishna' (published).
'Hopak', from Shevtchenko's *Haidamaks* (published).
'The Seminarist' (published and banned by the Censor).
'Yarema's Song' from Shevtchenko's *Haidamaks.*
Started a tone-picture, *A Night on the Bare Mountain.*
1867 Finished *A Night on the Bare Mountain* in full score.
'Gathering Mushrooms'.
'Jewish Song'.
'The Banquet' }
'The Goat' } (published).
'The Magpie'.
'The Ragamuffin'.
'The Classicist' (the first of the musical pamphlets—published).
1868 'The Orphan'.
'A Child's Song'.
First act of Gogol's *The Marriage* (composed on Gogol's text, with unimportant cuts). The opera *Boris Godunof* (after Pushkin) planned.
'The child with his nurse'(to appear shortly).
'Yeremushka's Lullaby' (to appear shortly).
First act of the opera *Boris Godunof.*
1869 The opera *Boris Godunof* finished.
1870 'The Peep-show' (a pamphlet—published).
'In the corner'.
'With the doll' }
'Evening prayer' } to appear shortly.
'The Cockchafer'.
'Scherzino' (The Seamstress).
Boris Godunof submitted to the management of the theatres, and rejected.
1871 New version of *Boris Godunof.*
A comic opera on a Gogol subject planned. The notion led to starting work on a national historic music drama in which the Cossacks of the Volga appear.

The only interesting things in this document are the few scraps of biographical information it contains. These will be referred to in due course. It may be noted here, however, that another reference to the projected comic opera on a Gogol subject occurs in a letter of 1872; but nothing further is known about what "the historical national music drama in which the Don Cossacks were to appear" was to be. Very tentatively, Andreï Rimsky-Korsakof suggests[4] that these lines refer to *Pugatchevshchina* (see *infra*, p. 193).

The other catalogue which was sent to Stassof is dated 16 August 1878; but, as it mentions no work composed later than 1874, Andreï Rimsky-Korsakof suggests, rightly, that it must have been compiled some four years earlier. Its only value is that of a biographical curiosity. Here is the translation:

TO VLADIMIR VASSILIEVITCH STASSOF IN MEMORY OF MUSSORIANIN
26 August '78, Petrograd.

Opus 1
Kinderscherz (1859)
Scherzo B flat major for orchestra (1859)
Intermezzo (1861)
Scherzino (1872)
Opus 2
The Destruction of Sennacherib (1867) } Choral
Joshua (1866)
Opus 3
Hopak (1866)
Gathering Mushrooms (1867)
Yeremushka's Lullaby (1868)
The Peasant's Lullaby (1865)
The Orphan (1868)
The He-Goat (1867)
Opus 4
The Ragamuffin (1868)
The Seminarist (1866)
Savishna (1866)
Opus 5
Night (1864)
King Saul (1863)
The Feast (1867)
Jewish Song (1867)
The Magpie (1867)
A Child's Song (1868)
Opus 6

(Album-*The Nursery*)
With Nanny
In the corner
The Cockchafer } 1868-69
Evening prayer
With the doll

Opus 7

An act of Gogol's *Marriage* (1868)

Opus 8

The Classicist (1867)
The Peep-show (1869)

Opus 9

The opera *Boris Godunof* (1868-1872)

Opus 10

Scenes from the opera *Mlada* (not an opera of mine): Glorification of Tchernobog (1873); March of the princes and priests (1873); Market scene

Opus 11

Pictures from an Exhibition (1874 in memory of Hartmann)

Opus 12

Sunless, an album of six poems by Count Golenishchef-Kutuzof (1874)

Separately:

Studies for the opera *Salammbô* after Flaubert (1864-1865)
I'm riding to Yukka! (1873)
The Old Believer's song (1874)
Forgotten (after Vereshchagin, 1874)
The Mound of Nettles (1874)
Materials for the opera *Khovanshchina* (a national music drama, 1874)

That's all I know.

M. MUSSORIANIN

CHAPTER II

Ancestry, Childhood, Early Youth

Mussorgsky's ancestry and family—Childhood in Karevo—School years in Petersburg—Disastrous atmosphere and influences—Musical Petersburg in the 'fifties—Mussorgsky meets Dargomyjsky, Borodin, Balakiref, and Cui

THE genealogy of the Mussorgsky family, as established by Karatyghin[16] goes back to Roman Vassilievitch Monastyref, who lived in the fifteenth century and was descended from Prince Yury Feodorovitch of Smolensk, of the lineage of Rurik.* But the branch of the family to which he belonged had become impoverished, and long lost its nobiliary title. Roman Monastyref was the first to bear the surname Mussorga, which two generations later (that is, towards the middle of the sixteenth century) had become Mussorgsky, and in the course of time took, now and then, the forms Mussorgskoy, Musserskoy and Mussorsky.†

Modest's great-grandfather, Grigory Grigorievitch, a rich landowner, was the first of the family to serve in the army (as officer in the Guards), thereby establishing a tradition which was followed by his two sons and was to determine the choice of a career for his great-grandson. His younger son, Alexeï (born 1758) served in the Preobrajensky Guards, a crack regiment founded by Peter the Great and enjoying many privileges. He had a son by a serf of his, Irene Egorovna, whom he married, legitimizing this son, Peter, in 1820.

Peter, owing to the circumstances of his birth, was debarred from entering the army but was posthumously entered in the register of the nobility. He was well off, owning 27,000 acres of land in the Government of Pskof, and also a small estate in the Government of Yaroslaf. Retiring in 1822, he settled on his land, and, a few years later, married Julia Ivanovna Tchirikova, who too belonged to a family of landowners. They had four sons. Two, born in 1833 and 1835 respectively, died in babyhood. The third was Philaret, born in 1836, and the fourth, Modest, who came into the world in the village of Karevo.

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* Rurik, a Variag (or Varangian) prince, ruler of Novgorod in the late ninth century. Descent from Rurik corresponds to descent from William the Conqueror.

† Modest, until late in the 'sixties, preferred the form Mussorsky, which he occasionally used even afterwards.

The correct date of his birth, 9/21 March 1839, was not known until 1911, when the text of his baptism certificate, discovered by B. Tiutchef, appeared in the *Russian Musical Gazette.* It said:

> Was born on 9 March, baptized on 13 March, Modest. His parents, of the village of Kajivo [for Karevo] the retired official, collegiate secretary, Peter Alexeief Mussorgsky, landowner, and his lawful wife, landowner, daughter of the government secretary Ivan Tchirikof, Julia Ivanovna, both belonging to the orthodox persuasion. The godparents were: the landowner, government secretary, Ivan Ivanof, son of Tchirikof, of the village of Bogorodytsyn, and the widow of the landowner, Major Grigory Alexeief, Irene Gheorghievsk. The officiating priest was Alexander Naumof Serebenitsky of the church of the Birth of the Holy Virgin. Was present at the baptism, the clerk Timofei Yakovlef Babinin.

The village of Karevo is in the district of Toropets, a region of vast plains and forests, south-west of the Valdai plateau, on the banks of Lake Jijitso, "on a picturesque hillock surrounded by great forests, in a luxuriant region teeming with wild animals and birds", Karatyghin says.[16] In 1910, when he visited Karevo, the house in which Mussorgsky was born had been pulled down, but one wing of it had been rebuilt not far from its original location. Mussorgsky spent the first ten years of his life in these beautiful and peaceful surroundings, all redolent of ancient Russia. No information whatever is available as to those years, apart from that contained in the autobiography, so that all comments and additions are bound to be conjectural.

We may surmise that his playmates included peasant children —possibly relations on his maternal grandmother's side. All his biographers in turn have pointed out that the atmosphere of the Russian countryside, with its old traditions and superstitions and close contact with the peasantry, must have exercised a great influence on the forming of his sensitiveness and mind. Karatyghin, recalling the fact that in the seventeenth century an envoy of the Streltsy (militia-men) to the people of Toropets in revolt had been drowned in Lake Jijitso, wonders whether the stories of those stormy times, which he must have heard in his childhood, did not sow the first seed of his interest in the history of past events and especially of those which provided the subject of his opera *Khovanshchina.*

The autobiography mentions the impression created in his mind by the fairy tales which his nurse used to tell him. Was this, as he avers, the origin of his longing to express in music "le tout de l'homme", or is this assertion to be regarded as a mere poetic figment? Pierre d'Alheim[5] has shrewdly defined the extent to which this order of tales is likely to act on the minds of Russian infants: "In the homes of the Russian gentry, children lived in a supernatural world which they loved and in which they believed. For them the Baba-Yaga, the witch who lived in a hut standing on hens' legs, Koshchei, the cruel, deathless giant, and Prince Ivan, the young hero who could raise boulders weighing a ton, were beings whose aspect and character stood definite and well known, who were always present and inspired love, friendship, terror, and hatred."

But all this belonged to the domain of picturesque, merely superficial fancy, and is capable of suggesting descriptive, pantomimic, graphic musical ideas, rather than ideas expressing the inner feelings and moods which are the main elements of "le tout de l'homme". Pantomimic and graphic evocations, as we shall see, play a big part in Mussorgsky's music, but not so the picturesque and fantastic elements brilliantly put to use by Glinka and other Russians, especially Rimsky-Korsakof. Apart from the delightful first number of his song-set *The Nursery,* which evokes a child delighted with the impressive tales told by his nurse, the only things of his inspired by fantastic subjects are a couple of piano pieces in the *Pictures from an Exhibition* and the tone-poem *A Night on the Bare Mountain.* The speech, and also the songs, of the people around him may have created, even at that early time, stronger, far more lasting impressions. "It was not in vain", he wrote in 1870 to his friend Nikolsky, "that in my childhood I loved to listen to the mujiks and tried my best to learn their songs". Later in life he availed himself of every opportunity to stay in the heart of the countryside, observing the people, marking their aspect and manners and noting down folk-songs (whose chief interest for him lay in their racial or expressive idiosyncrasies) and vernacular inflexions. His chief preoccupation was to limn the characters he evoked in song or in opera accurately, and to express their feelings as directly and truly as possible.

He and his brother Philaret received the education normally given to boys of their class, and were destined to a military career. Peter Mussorgsky, "who worshipped music", encouraged his son Modest's early disposition for piano playing and also (according to the autobiography) for extemporizing. The boy received his first piano lessons from his mother. Karatyghin informs us that Julia Mussorgsky is said to have been "fairly nimble at the piano, of a romantic, excitable, dreamy, affectionate disposition". She was also an indefatigable writer of mediocre verse. His second instructress was a German teacher. Musical parties used to take place in the home, and so, no doubt, he became acquainted with part of the drawing-room repertory of the period. At one of these parties, as he records, he played at the age of nine, a big concerto by Field.

There is every reason to accept what he has to say of his early successes and later progress as a pianist. In fact, all the later information we have makes it clear that he had wonderful gifts in that direction.

In August 1849, Peter Mussorgsky took his two sons to Petersburg. Boys not being admitted to the School for Cadets of the Guards before the age of thirteen, Modest spent two years at the Peter-and-Paul School, which was run by Germans on German lines, and provided excellent methodical tuition. His father arranged for him to receive piano lessons from Anton Herke, a pupil of Henselt, and a brilliant virtuoso whose lessons, at the time, were in great request. Herke instructed him in all that concerned piano playing, and acquainted him with a good deal of German music, including, probably, Schumann's (in which, Stassof records, no other teacher in Petersburg was interested at the time); but he taught him, according to the testimonies of both Philaret and Kompaneisky, nothing about musical theory—not even the most elementary principles.

These two years must have been thoroughly congenial to Modest, who was seeing a city for the first time in his life, and having experiences very different from his earlier ones in the segregated, patriarchal, indolent, non-intellectual atmosphere of his country home. He was of a studious, quiet, inquiring disposition, and genuinely fond of music. His first public success—the playing of a Rondo by Herz at a charity function under the patronage of a lady of the aristocracy, and Herke's subsequent gift, by way of reward, of a copy of a Beethoven Sonata in A flat (whether Op. 26 or Op. 110 is not recorded)—must have made him feel very proud.

This was in 1851. That same year, he left the Peter-and-Paul School for the Pension Komarof, which specialized in preparing candidates for the entrance examination at the School for Cadets. There existed, Findeisen says,[19] a good many of these private institutions; they were expensive, but guaranteed success at the examination. This they could safely do, considering that the proprietors or teachers were members of the board of examiners. This easy way of securing commissions in the Guards for their sons was attractive to parents who could afford the expense. Komarof's charges, no doubt, were commensurate with the advantage he was able to offer. At the School for Cadets, the fees for tuition were 400 roubles per annum for pupils training for commissions in infantry regiments, and 450 if the goal was the cavalry. Parents, moreover, had to show that they would provide their sons with sufficient money to keep up their position.

After a year with Komarof, Mussorgsky entered the School for Cadets. The description we have of conditions at this school are such as to make one shudder as one thinks of a boy of thirteen suddenly transferred there. The curriculum, apparently, included no physical training, and the pupils, outside school hours, used to indulge in reckless dissipation. The head of the school, General Sutgof, is said to have been a kindhearted, well-meaning man, who did his best to improve matters and instil into his young charges a sense of restraint and self-respect. But, according to Kompaneisky, he had not achieved much, and his views on such points were very much in keeping with Russian army usage:

> At the School for Cadets, Mussorgsky found the same feudal atmosphere as in his native countryside. Each cadet had a manservant, a serf, who was liable to be beaten by order of the Commander whenever he incurred his master's displeasure. The relations between junior and senior cadets were those of serf to master. The seniors styled themselves 'honourable cornets', but the juniors were mere 'vandals'. Each 'cornet' had a 'vandal' for his fag, whose duties included that of carrying his master pick-a-back to the wash-stand whenever ordered to do so. They regarded preparing lessons as beneath their dignity, and General Sutgof shared this view. All their dreams centred in the glory and grandeur of the Guardsman's uniform. All the time not taken up by the service was devoted to dancing, philandering, and getting drunk. General Sutgof had issued stern injunctions that his pupils, when

drunk, should not return to the school on foot, and that they should never drink common vodka. But he felt proud when one of them, overcome with champagne, was brought back in a carriage and pair. Such was the institution in which Mussorgsky spent years of his youth, devoting so much time to studying German philosophy, history, and foreign languages that the General, who wished him well, used to say to him, "*Mon cher*, what kind of an officer will *you* make!"

Mussorgsky continued his piano lessons with Herke until 1853, and also attended those which Herke gave to the General's daughter. He played a good deal, was fond of extemporizing, and belonged to the school choir.

> He had no idea of the rules of music [Kompaneisky says], and was incapable of putting notes down on staved paper. He used to sing, in a fresh baritone voice, arias from Italian operas, but in accordance with the prescription of the *bon ton*, knew nothing whatever of the Russian composers—not even of Glinka and Dargomijsky. When he mentioned in his autobiography, that he acquired, under Father Krupsky's guidance, a thorough knowledge of old church music, orthodox and catholic, he was merely revealing that even at the time of writing, he knew little of these subjects. In my own schooldays (in 1866) Krupsky was still there. Being greatly interested in church music, I had many occasions to consult him and find out that his knowledge was but rudimentary.

That Mussorgsky really learnt very little from Krupsky is confirmed by some anonymous recollections relating to this period which say that the good priest's influence on his pupils was very slight, and also by the following passage in the 'M.P.' letter of 1881 to the *Russky Muzykalny Viestnik* (see *supra*, p. 5):

> I showed Father Krupsky Stassof's article on Mussorgsky [in which portions of the autobiography had been used] and asked him for particulars of Mussorgsky's "thorough studies". He smiled and said that the boy, who sang in the school choir, had evinced interest in the composers whose music was used in church; whereupon he, Krupsky, had given him works by Bortniansky [1751-1825] and even more recent composers to study.

The austere church chants of old Russia, Findeisen remarks, were not included in the repertory of the school choir.

He found among his schoolfellows a few budding music-lovers —one of them Michael Azantchevsky, later the head of the

Petersburg Conservatoire. The musical talents which rendered him generally popular were not of a kind to foreshadow the future. He delighted his comrades by his singing, his extemporizations, and his playing of popular pieces. One wonders whether his repertory included the Beethoven sonata given to him by Herke; but he was ever ready to provide dance music—among which, no doubt, was the 'Porte-Enseigne Polka', inscribed to his fellow-cadets and published "to his shame, and with his father's help" (meaning, presumably, at his father's expense) in 1852. No copy of this youthful effort has ever been discovered.

In 1853, Peter Mussorgsky died. Modest's prospects were in no way altered by this event, and we do not know how the loss affected him. No information is available on Peter Mussorgsky's character or on his relations with his sons, except that he seems to have been a kindhearted man, eager to do his best for his children.

In the autumn of 1856, a year after his brother, Modest entered the Preobrajensky Regiment with the rank of ensign. It was at that time that the first photograph of him known so far was taken. This shows him standing, in full-dress uniform, looking very boyish (fourteen years old, rather than seventeen, in fact), unsophisticated, earnest, and open, with thick, rather long, dark hair, a good broad forehead, frank eyes under almost frowning eyebrows, a snub nose, a very big mouth, biggish ears, and a fairly heavy jaw. The attitude and expression suggest nothing of the inclination to pretentiousness which Borodin notes in the delightful pen-portrait he gave Stassof of him as seen when the two first met (in September or October 1856; Borodin was his senior by six years):

> I had just been appointed an army doctor, and Mussorgsky was a newly hatched officer. Being on hospital duty we met in the common-room; and feeling bored and in need of human companionship, we started talking and forthwith found one another congenial. The same evening we were invited to the doctor-in-chief's home. Having a grown-up daughter, he often gave parties to which the officers on duty were asked. Mussorgsky was, at that time, a very callow, most elegant, perfectly contrived little officer: brand-new close fitting uniform, toes well turned out, hair well oiled and carefully smoothed out, hands shapely and well cared for. His manners were polished, aristocratic. He spoke rather through his teeth, and his carefully chosen words were interspersed with French phrases and rather laboured. He showed, in fact, signs of a slight pretentiousness; but also, quite unmistakably,

of perfect breeding and education. He sat down at the piano, and, coquettishly raising his hands, started playing, delicately and gracefully, bits of *Trovatore* and *Traviata*, the circle around him rapturously murmuring the while "Charmant! Délicieux!" That season, I met him three or four times in all. Years elapsed before we met again.

The atmosphere around Mussorgsky was in most respects as unwholesome as at the School for Cadets:

> The officers devoted as much time as possible to dancing, drinking, gambling, and having expedient *affaires* with wealthy ladies of the aristocracy, or, failing that, wives of wealthy merchants. The years Mussorgsky spent in the army had disastrous consequences. He not only lost his interest in reading and studying, but acquired a craving for drink. Later, while recognizing how very harmful those surroundings had been for him, he used to add: "But it could not have been otherwise in the Preobrajensky Guards!" Another of the friends he made later, Nadejda Rimsky-Korsakof, records that "whereas he always enjoyed talking of his childhood in the country, he never spoke of his army years, obviously hating the very memory of them, and of the evil influences which had wrecked his health for ever.[4] "

There can be no doubt that his experiences at the School for Cadets and in the army were primarily responsible for the dipsomania which broke out later. There is no evidence that he acquired any vice other than a craving for alcohol. He found among his brother officers a few congenial companions, notably a certain Orfano, who sang; Orlof, who composed military marches; Nicholas Obolensky, who was a passable pianist, and to whom he inscribed a piano-piece 'Souvenir d'Enfance' (the manuscript bears the date 16 [28] October 1857); Grigory Demidof, who won appreciation in the 'sixties as a composer of drawing-room ballads; and Feodor Vanliarsky, who had the entrée to musical circles, and with whom he formed an enduring friendship (in 1877, he inscribed to him the song 'Not like thunder from heaven'). So, he may have felt reasonably happy, living with his mother and brother, leading what he must have regarded (if he ever gave a thought to the matter) as the normal life for one of his status, and nourishing, so far as can be known, no great artistic ambitions. He might have long continued perfectly content with his lot had not Vanliarsky introduced him to Dargomyjsky, whose home was a meeting place for musicians of all kinds.

This introduction marked the turning point. Mussorgsky was suddenly brought into contact with a world unknown to him, with music lovers who took music very much in earnest and composers who were dreaming of high achievements. He underwent stimulating experiences in quick succession. Within a short time he became acquainted with Balakiref, César Cui, and the brothers Stassof—Vladimir and Dimitri. For the first time, he was enabled to take stock of himself by comparing his own musical outlook and capacities with those of his new friends, under the influence of whom he developed a strong interest in all things musical and began to think of devoting himself to composition.

Petersburg was not a promising field for a young Russian composer. The public was interested in Italian opera only. Glinka died on 15 February 1857. Fifteen years before, his admirable opera *Ruslan and Liudmila*, the first signal example of really Russian music, had failed owing to the indifference of the public and the hostility of Court circles. It was, as noted by Kompaneisky and many others, fashionable to look down on Russian music, and, in proportion as new developments took place on national lines, opposition was to grow stronger.

But the worst was the absolute lack of facilities for composers to study technique. There were no schools (the Petersburg and Moscow Conservatoires were founded in 1862 and 1864 respectively), no competent teachers, not even an adequate supply of technical books. Glinka had gone abroad for tuition. Dargomyjsky, otherwise self-taught, had received useful advice from Glinka, who lent him the note-books in which he had jotted down instructions given to him by Dehn in Berlin. So, unavoidably, young musicians tended to associate, to pool what little knowledge they had, and to help one another make the best of circumstances.

Dargomyjsky was, at that time, the only Russian composer of any standing. His house naturally became the meeting place of the musicians who had frequented Glinka's and also of their juniors. He enjoyed their society, and was interested in their ambitions. In 1859 he wrote to one of his friends: "You cannot imagine how happy I am in my little circle, whose members are few, but genuinely devoted to one another and to their art. We play Russian music assiduously, industriously, and without any quest of mere effect."

He was already formulating the tenets of musical realism which Mussorgsky, later, was to make his own. It was in 1857 that he made, in a letter to Karmalina, the following often-quoted profession of faith: "My position as a composer is deplorable: most of our dilettanti and critics regard me as uninspired. They are creatures of routine, who want nothing but tunes fit to flatter their ears. I have no desire to debase music to the level of an amusement for their sake. I want the notes to express the words directly. I want truth."

So Mussorgsky's words, "it was at the moment I became acquainted with Dargomyjsky that my musical life began", are quite true. But the tale of his relations—and also of those of his friends—with Dargomyjsky is not so simple as might appear in the light of the autobiography and the early literature on the subject.

The facts of the matter are that Mussorgsky joined the circle at a moment when Dargomyjsky was held in high esteem by the young men who had already mustered around him. His early opera *Esmeralda* (the subject of which was taken from Victor Hugo's novel *Notre-Dame de Paris*) had fallen flat both in Moscow (1847) and in Petersburg (1851); but his *Russalka*, given at Petersburg in 1855, although not supported by the public, had created a favourable impression—especially among progressively minded musicians. The dramatic and comic scenes in it, and especially the original and telling handling of the recitatives, were regarded as marking the dawn of a new era in Russian opera. But the atmosphere of the circle proved to be far from stimulating. Dargomyjsky, fond of adulation, and smarting under a sense of injury owing to the scant success of his operas, lived surrounded by mediocre musicians, amateurs and professionals, who pandered to his taste for flattery. According to Yuri Arnold's *Recollections* (Moscow, 1891-93) the Russian music played at his parties was chiefly his own. He was also jealous of Glinka's fame and successes, and may have shown this feeling clearly enough to irritate uncompromising champions of Glinka such as Balakiref and the Stassof brothers. It is significant that Vladimir Stassof should have nicknamed the circle 'The Russian Invalids', and that at a later date Mussorgsky should have written to Balakiref, "the part of a pasha *à la* Dargomyjsky befits you ill". So, after a time the whole group, except Cui, ceased to frequent Dargomyjsky's house.

There is nothing to show that his views on musical realism had impressed Mussorgsky at that early stage. No sign of realistic ambitions is to be found in the early letters, nor in the early songs and instrumental pieces. Maybe the notion of composing an opera on the subject of Victor Hugo's blood-curdling *Hans d'Islande* was conceived under the influence of Dargomyjsky's *Esmeralda*. But it was, as Mussorgsky himself acknowledged, merely a childish vagary.

After the withdrawal from Dargomyjsky's circle, his attitude to Dargomyjsky's music became contemptuous. Derogatory references to it occur in his letters to Balakiref as late as 1867. But, in the course of that year, a *rapprochement* took place, when Dargomyjsky had already started work on *The Stone Guest* (see *infra*, chapter VIII), a work in which the group—which by then had grown larger, and included Borodin and Rimsky-Korsakof among others —was profoundly interested. By then, however, Mussorgsky had progressed independently; as will be seen, many of his most characteristic songs were composed between 1864 and 1866. Nevertheless, the new line struck in *The Stone Guest* proved most stimulating to him. It corresponded to many of his own, still rather vague, aspirations. He learnt much from Dargomyjsky's methods and received much encouragement from him. It is to this later period that his tributes to Dargomyjsky in the autobiography, and in the inscription of the song 'Yeremushka's Lullaby' (1868), "to the great leader in the quest for musical truth", refer.

The most important result of Mussorgsky's early contact with Dargomyjsky was that he met Balakiref.

Mily Balakiref, then twenty years of age, was a born leader and educator. In his youth, spent in his native city of Nijny-Novgorod, he had shown a rare musical instinct, coupled with an infinite capacity for self-tuition, which had aroused the interest of Ulybyshef, a keen music lover who maintained a private orchestra and owned a fine musical library. He was engaged as assistant conductor to this orchestra, and so acquired much knowledge and practical experience. At the end of 1855, Ulybyshef took him to St. Petersburg, where his piano playing and earliest compositions won immediate recognition. He was introduced to Glinka, who predicted that "in time, he would become a second Glinka", and to Dargomyjsky, who was no less favourably impressed. By 1857, he had already started giving advice to César Cui, his senior by two years. Mussorgsky, having decided to tackle composition in earnest, quite naturally and indeed unavoidably, applied to him for tuition.

It was for Mussorgsky—and was to be, a little later, for Borodin and Rimsky-Korsakof—a great piece of good fortune to find Balakiref at hand, not only capable of teaching, but eager to teach and encourage. There existed at the time in Russia no professional schools, and no other competent instructor could have been found, and, as we have observed, no adequate supply of text-books. With his knowledge, his infectious courage and enthusiasm, Balakiref was the very man of whom the budding Russian composers stood in need. He too had been handicapped by the lack of facilities for learning his craft. Surmounting many obstacles, he had fought his way through; and in turn he showed them the way to learn, as he had learnt: from practice and experience.

Rimsky-Korsakof, in his Memoirs, was to criticize his methods of tuition with the utmost severity, describing them as too empirical, inconsistent, and in most respects inadequate, and alleging, among other things, that "never having suffered from his lack of technical knowledge, he could not see that others might stand in need of such knowledge".

There is no lack of evidence[6] that Rimsky-Korsakof was mistaken on this last point, and very unfair to Balakiref. In fact, the publication of the Memoirs (in 1909) was followed by a storm of protest throughout Russia. The best critics, and notably Findeisen, Karenin and Timofeief, agreed in describing the Memoirs as entirely subjective, and in pointing out that Rimsky-Korsakof had written them some thirty years after the event: so that shortness of memory and the changes which had taken place in his own outlook had led him to be, quite unintentionally, inaccurate in his description of Balakiref and his circle, and deplorably to underrate the value to himself and to others of the young master's teaching and influence. Far from despising technique, or even theory (as late as 1878, he urged Mussorgsky to study harmony under Rimsky-Korsakof: see *infra* p. 196), Balakiref did his utmost to help his pupils master all branches of their craft. He turned their attention to the discipline of instrumental forms, insisting that they should practise composing symphony movements, and making Beethoven's music, among others, the basis of a practical schooling which included the study of a wide range of masterpieces, ancient and modern. And so, while inclining to insist that they should follow every behest of his docilely (for he was, as he himself acknowledged, despotic in temperament), he taught them to think for themselves.

"Being no theorist," he wrote to Stassof in 1881, "I was unable to teach Mussorgsky harmony as Rimsky-Korsakof was to teach it later. But I explained form to him. We used to play together all Beethoven's symphonies at the piano and also works by Schumann, Schubert, Glinka and others. I explained to him the technicalities of their structure, and made him analyse their form. So far as I can remember, I gave him but few paid lessons: somehow or other, they gradually turned into friendly conversations."[1]

Many years later, Balakiref wrote in reply to another enquiry: "The music we studied together consisted mainly of works by Bach, Handel, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, Berlioz and Liszt. Mussorgsky had already become familiar, without my help, with the works of Glinka and Dargomyjsky" (Letter to M. D. Calvocoressi, 4 August 1906).

Rimsky-Korsakof's Memoirs also ascribe to Balakiref and his circle certain iconoclastic views on the German classics, on Chopin, and on Liszt. Again there is evidence to show that those views were not Balakiref's own, but those of other members of the circle—as often as not, of a certain Nikolaï Borozdin, a confirmed jester, and a composer of no importance whatsoever, whose orbit crossed that of Balakiref for a while. Even so, the question might arise how far those views may have contributed to Mussorgsky's later distaste for musical theory and for German methods of composition. But it is more than doubtful whether they had the slightest influence upon him. Indeed, all we know of him, and all we are able to surmise, shows that in no circumstances could he have developed otherwise than he did, and that he was not destined by nature to become a composer of instrumental music.

César Cui (born at Vilna in 1835) enjoyed the prestige not only of being in the army, and senior in rank to Mussorgsky, but of having received lessons from Moniuszko, a Polish composer of established reputation. So he must have made a certain impression upon the youngster. A few years later, he was to be appointed music critic of a leading Petersburg daily. Eventually, he became the self-appointed spokesman of the group, and was for a time regarded—quite undeservedly—as its leader jointly with Balakiref. He held views very similar to Dargomyjsky's, but was not capable of putting them into practice to any appreciable extent, his not very original talent being for lyrical rather than for dramatic music. He used to proclaim that with Beethoven, Schumann, Berlioz and Liszt the art of symphony had reached perfection, so that no further progress was possible, whereas dramatic music was still in a transitional stage, and that alone the new Russian school realized the right way to bring it to perfection.[4]

The relations between the two soon became friendly. Mussorgsky was made welcome at Cui's home and also at that of his future parents-in-law. He inscribed a song to Cui's fiancée, Malvina Bamberg, joined in private performances of plays by Gogol and also (in 1859) of Cui's comic opera *The Mandarin's Son*, in which he took the main part, singing and acting with remarkable skill and verve.

Cui's narrow and pedantic outlook must have jarred upon Mussorgsky from the first. In 1867, in a letter to Rimsky-Korsakof concerning the *Night on the Bare Mountain*, he wrote "I have used harmonies for which Cui would send me to the Conservatoire". The story of their later relations is summed up as follows: "In the 'seventies* Cui began to display eclectic and academic tendencies; and his criticism of the works of his comrades became censorious, at times even offensive, in tone. His notice of *Boris Godunof* in 1874 wounded Mussorgsky to the quick. But until then Mussorgsky continued to trust Cui 'stupidly and blindly'—Vladimir Stassof's words in a letter of August 1873 to his brother Dimitri."

Vladimir Stassof, on the contrary, was to play an important part in Mussorgsky's life and artistic evolution. But his influence at first was of the same very general, indefinite order. He was keenly interested in music, eager to help, advise, and champion Russian composers. He talked music abundantly and eloquently. He teemed with ideas and plans for descriptive symphonic works and for opera libretti, and was always ready to help composers with suggestions and information, which often proved most valuable. In his obituary of Mussorgsky he wrote: "I first met him in 1857, and forthwith we became great friends". He may have liked him from the first—most people could not help doing so, then and later—but he had, at first, no high opinion of his mind and musicianship. In 1863, that is, after six years of 'friendship', he wrote to Balakiref: "I have no use whatever for Mussorgsky. All in him is flabby and dull. He is, I think, a perfect idiot. Were he left to his own devices and no longer under your strict supervision, he would soon run to seed as all the others have done.

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* Even in the early days Cui was not capable of directing or advising others, except in terms of vague generalities.

There is nothing in him."[29] To which Balakiref replied: "Yes, Mussorgsky is little short of an idiot."[29]

It was only in the late 'sixties that Stassof changed his mind. Then he became Mussorgsky's warmest admirer and most active champion. He was to be the only one of the group to realize the composer's exceptional greatness, to understand the peculiarities of his artistic outlook, and to encourage him—maybe, at times, rather uncritically.

CHAPTER III

1857—1862

Mussorgsky becomes Balakiref's pupil—Studies and exercises —First compositions—Illness—Resigns his commission to become a composer—Visits to Moscow—Morbid crisis— Mussorgsky at twenty—New outbreak of illness—His prospects altered after the liberation of the serfs—Cure and stay in the country—His ideas and plans

SUCH were the conditions under which Mussorgsky, at the age of seventeen, set about the task of becoming a composer. A callow amateur, he knew nothing whatever about theory and technique. He had no clear idea of what he wanted to do in music, no particular leaning towards any order of composition, nor, so far as can be ascertained, any natural facility for composing. An obscure, irresistible instinct drove him towards a goal of whose nature he had not the faintest inkling. For guidance, he relied entirely on Balakiref.

Balakiref's interests centred in instrumental music, and his method of teaching tended to encourage impulsiveness rather than methodical discipline; it was, one French critic has pointed out, suitable for men of genius only. Mussorgsky's genius turned out to be of a particularly impetuous, wayward order. It is doubtful whether the ordinary rule-of-thumb methods of tuition practised at the time would have been more beneficial to him. We may imagine that if Balakiref's mind had been more flexible, if he had been capable of seeing things from his pupil's point of view, he might have helped him better. But, once again, Mussorgsky in those early days had no definite point of view, and nobody could have foreseen in which direction his future lay. By the time his individuality began to assert itself—seven or eight years later—Balakiref's influence on him was very much on the wane; and it had become obvious that the two would never see eye to eye.

The Russian critic Igor Gliebof has said that "Mussorgsky's greatest misfortune was that he came into the world half a century too early. The technique he would have required in order to achieve his ends to the full had not yet come into being."[40] Nor had methods of tuition proceeded beyond what Donald Tovey calls "the accepted criterion of correctness". The notion that the ideal teacher is "not an infallible dictator, but one who places himself in the midst of his pupils, seeks diligently, and is sometimes rewarded by finding" (Arnold Schönberg, in his *Treatise of Harmony*) belongs to a much later period. Balakiref, although he inclined to be dictatorial, came closer to this ideal than any of his contemporaries. He was intolerant, but certainly not superstitious in the matter of obeying conventional rules: for instance, he was the first composer to dare start a composition in one key and finish it in another (*Tamara*—see *infra*, chapter XVIII).

Mussorgsky, on the other hand, was no easy pupil to deal with, even at that early period. Yet Balakiref succeeded in persuading him to work more or less methodically, and in inspiring him with a desire to acquire the art of "writing decently". Mussorgsky's letters to his teacher teem with expressions of affection and trust; and they show that Balakiref returned the affection, if not the trust. Balakiref, in fact, never ceased to regard Mussorgsky as weak-minded, and misguided in musical matters. Mussorgsky, in turn, came to lose confidence in him as a guide. But he remained deeply grateful to him to the end; and the tribute he paid to him in the autobiography was a thoroughly genuine expression of his actual feelings.

The lessons began in 1857. During the following twelve months Mussorgsky divided his energies between the work prescribed by Balakiref and composition according to plans of his own, the most important of which was incidental music for Sophocles' tragedy *Œdipus Rex* in Shistakof's Russian translation (published in 1852).* He was to carry on with this ambitious undertaking at intervals until 1861, when he finally gave it up.

The first of his letters to Balakiref (16 December 1858) deals with the purchase of a piano selected by Balakiref. The next day he wrote:

> Thank Heaven, the fate of the piano is settled. It will be delivered to-morrow. A thousand thanks for selecting such a good one. *La machine est parfaitement solide.* To-day I thumped the keyboard so lustily that my fingertips are aching—all needles and pins. But the machine is unhurt, except that one string has gone wrong. For Wednesday I shall

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* Actually an opera based on Ozerof's play *Œdipus at Athens*—*Ed.*

procure Beethoven's second Symphony, to which will befall the honour of inaugurating the instrument.

A few weeks later (25 February 1858) a first sign of discouragement crops up:

> To my great shame I must confess that the Allegro is not yet ready. So, reluctantly, I defer to your wish that I should write if I happened not to have finished in time this Allegro, which bores me terribly. However, I do not despair: I hope to come to you within a week, and try out my task on your piano. I am for the time being overcome by laziness, by a sluggishness which I simply cannot shake off. No, nothing in the world would induce me to write Eastern music: it is all snares and pitfalls. Au revoir. This letter starts gloomily, and ends stupidly.

No trace remains of the Allegro in question. It was, it would seem, a mere exercise prescribed by Balakiref. The remark on Eastern music is difficult to explain. Maybe Balakiref had suggested that Mussorgsky should use Eastern themes in the Allegro. Andreï Rimsky-Korsakof, however, holds that it refers to the introduction to *Œdipus* which Mussorgsky finished shortly afterwards. Other remarks of his on Eastern music were recorded by Borodin and Kompaneisky. At times, however, he did—as will be seen—write Eastern music.

A letter wrongly dated Tuesday, 8 June, but obviously written, Andreï Rimsky-Korsakof points out, on Tuesday 8 July (the postmark bears the date 12 July), mentions the introduction to *Œdipus*, work on a piano sonata, and also matters unconnected with music. It is the earliest document providing indications of noteworthy character traits: for instance, of his dislike for loose talk and coarse jokes.

> Yesterday, at the Stassofs, I had the pleasure of reading your letter to them from Moscow. Your description of the Kremlin stirred my imagination deeply. I thank you for it. Five minutes of dreams induced by it gave me inexpressible delight—indeed, the whole letter delighted me. Nothing to tell you about myself: same work, same amusements. I am about to leave for the country for the wedding [his brother's]. I have begun a Sonata in E flat major. I shall see it through somehow or other. I'll try to do the job well. I intend to start with a little introduction in B flat, and pass on to the Allegro by means of a pedal-point. Then, I am at work on the Scherzo; and, in my leisure hours, on practical exercises in harmony. I am terribly eager to learn the art of correct part-writing.

My brother and I played Schumann's B flat and C major Symphonies. We enjoyed them very much. He is good at sight-reading. Yesterday Stassof advised me, on the marriage day, to inspect the bride under the corset. I protested, and a two-hour discourse on privy parts ensued . . . I was so bored! I played the Introduction (Overture) to *Œdipus*, and also a few themes I intend to use in the work. Stassof seemed pleased with it all—very gratifying. I shall write to you from Tikhvin. Excuse my bad handwriting. I have been rather out of sorts all the week.

Mussorgsky did not think of telling Balakiref that three days before—on 5/17 July—he had resigned his commission in order to be able to devote his whole time to music. He had just been attached to a battalion stationed at Tsarskaya-Slavianka—not very far from St. Petersburg, yet far enough to make it impossible to continue living with his family and keeping up his daily relations with his musical friends, and especially with Balakiref. Vladimir Stassof had vainly tried to dissuade him. "Lermontof", he told him, "was able to devote as much time as he wished to poetry without giving up his army career." To which Mussorgsky replied: "I am not Lermontof. What may have suited him could not suit me."

The indisposition alluded to in the letter was the nervous breakdown which Mussorgsky's autobiographical notes (see *supra*, p. 8) mention as having taken place in 1859. It was serious enough for him to be sent to Tikhvin to take the waters.

Shortly after his return to town he wrote to Balakiref, who was then at Nijny Novgorod:

My brother and I thoroughly enjoyed our stay in the country. Popular rejoicings took place, most successfully, on the day of the wedding. And I decided to compose the Sonata in E flat major and inscribe it to the young couple. I am at work on a Sonata in F sharp minor, very simple, and I have composed some songs. I have been reading Gluck's *Alceste*, *Iphigénie en Aulide* and *Armide*; and also *Cinna*.*

To-day I am finishing reading Mozart's *Requiem*. I played the Beethoven sonatas which I do not yet know. I love the *Quasi Fantasia*. My mind is wrapped in *Œdipus*. As I wish, dearest Mily, to inscribe this work to you, I am devoting much thought to it. I may be going to Murom at the end of August. Then I shall not be very far from you; and if you stay over there until mid-September, we might return to Petersburg together. I too wish to see Moscow and the Volga, and to visit Vladimir.

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* Which of the operas of that name he refers to is not known.

> During my leisure hours, I am translating Lavater's letters on the condition of the soul after death—a fascinating subject, about which I have always dreamt. He says that after death the soul is able to transmit its thought to a living being endowed with clairvoyance, thus enabling this being to understand where the soul in question is. Just think of those relations between souls! I expect you will read it all in my translation.
>
> All the time I am thinking, thinking, of many relevant things. Plans teem in my mind. If they could materialize it would be splendid. I'll tell you all about them when I see you. I have a lot of writing to do just now, and I fear my letters may not be quite to your liking. I have not yet acquired the capacity to write relevantly, and frivolous chatter soon becomes wearisome.

Later, he was to give Balakiref further particulars of his illness and mental condition during that summer, acknowledging that he had, at the time, deliberately understated matters in order not to distress him. The crisis, however, was short. And during the following months he was buoyant and active.

Of the sonatas he mentions in the above letter nothing further is known. His output for the year consisted of two songs, both of a conventional order: one a setting of Heine's 'Du meines Herzens Sehnsucht', the other 'Pray tell me, fair maiden' to Russian words; the Introduction to *Œdipus*; a Scherzo in B flat major, orchestrated with Balakiref's help; another in C sharp minor, for piano; and piano arrangements of a couple of compositions by Glinka.

It was in October 1858 that he made his début as an amateur actor at a party at Cui's house. And a curious little document dated 25 December 1858—very possibly a mere memento of some bit of Christmas fun—suggests that he may, at that early date, have conceived (or been given) the notion of composing an opera on the subject of Gogol's tale 'St. John's Night'. It consists of one sheet of paper, and runs as follows: "Programme of the opera *St. John's Night*, in three acts, after the tale by Gogol, written by P. Boborykin, in the presence and with the help of Modest Mussorgsky, Eugen Mussorgsky* and Vassily.† Witness to the proceedings: Mily Balakiref."[4]

The temple scene in *Œdipus* was finished on 23 January 1859, in a draft for double choir with piano accompaniment. Apart from that, the first few months of the year were uneventful. A letter to Balakiref of 7 January registers the first wound to Mussorgsky's vanity: "I am angry with you and Cui because you brushed my polka aside". Was this the 'Porte-Enseigne Polka' of 1852, belatedly exhibited, or a later one, no trace of which remains? Impossible to tell. Mussorgsky went on, sententiously: "Of course it is so insignificant as not to be worth a second thought. In my opinion, polkas, waltzes, and dance music generally are mere pigmies."

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* Philaret was sometimes called thus.

† Who 'Vassily' was is not known. Mussorgsky, a few months later, thought of composing an opera on Pissemsky's tale 'The Liesky' (The Goblin).[7] Neither scheme was followed up. They may have helped, in a measure, to turn his thoughts to Russian subjects.

At the beginning of May, Mussorgsky started on a long journey through Russia. He went first to Gliebovo, near Moscow, on a visit to his friends, Stepan Shilovsky and his wife Maria. He was an officer and a wealthy landowner; and she a very attractive society woman and amateur singer.* There was in their house a private stage on which whole operas used to be performed—often under Constantine Liadof, the conductor of the Petersburg Marinsky Theatre. Mussorgsky (who is said to have been more or less strongly attracted by his hostess's charms) spent a happy time there, after which he went to Moscow. On 23 June he wrote to Balakiref:

> At last I have seen Moscow. Even as I entered the city, I noticed how original it all was, how redolent of olden times the church spires were. The delightful Red Gate fascinated me. And the Kremlin. The wonderful Kremlin! I approached it with instinctive awe. The Red Square, the scene of so many memorable convulsions, is not seen at its best when viewed from the left—that is, from the Gostinny Dvor [i.e. the Bazaar]. But St. Basil the Blessed, and the Kremlin walls make one forget all imperfections: there we have sacred antiquity indeed! My impressions of St. Basil were so pleasant, and at the same time so strange, that it seemed to me I was beholding a procession of boyars in long robes and high fur bonnets. Passing the Saviour's Gate, I bared my head. I like this old custom.
>
> The New Palace is splendid. The best hall in it is the Faceted Hall, where the Patriarch Nikon among others stood trial. And the Cathedral of the Assumption, that of the Archangels, the Church of Our Saviour, these other grand monuments of the past! In the Cathedral of the Archangels, I gazed reverently upon the tombs: those of Ivan III, of Dimitri Donskoy, and of the Romanofs. These last made me think of *A Life for the Tsar*, and instinctively I lingered by them. I ascended

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* "She was very popular in Moscow and Petersburg society during the 'forties and 'fifties. She had studied under Dargomyjsky, and composed a few ballads. Tchaikovsky alludes to her stormy past."[4]

the tower 'Ivan the Great' from the top of which I had a wonderful view. Roving through the streets I remembered the dictum "All Muscovites bear a distinctive hall-mark". This is certainly true of the common people. Nowhere else in the world could beggars and rogues of the same kind be found. They have a strange demeanour, a nimbleness of motion that struck me particularly. In short, I feel as if I had been carried into a new world, the world of yore—an unclean one, but one which nevertheless impresses me most favourably. You know I was a cosmopolitan; now I feel reborn, and quite close to all that is Russian. If anybody were to deal with Russia unceremoniously, I should deplore it: for I am beginning to love her. By the way, I was forgetting: in the Hall of Armours, is Tsar Alexeï Mikhaïlovitch's carriage—a huge affair, built abroad, inside which is an easy chair of the European kind (a sort of *porte-chaise*). Looking at it, I had a vision of the Tsar sitting there and giving orders to the generals summoned from Little-Russia.

These clear and strong impressions; this sudden feeling of being a Russian and loving Russia; this capacity to observe and capture the characteristic features of the people, unquestionably foretoken the spirit of Mussorgsky's mature work: of the wonderful songs which so tellingly describe the human beings they evoke, of *Boris Godunof* and *Khovanshchina*. Already he has got hold of the setting and atmosphere of these two masterpieces: the nation's part is to him a live reality. But the germ was to mature slowly. He was barely twenty, and not anywhere near finding himself. He lacked experience and had not acquired the capacity to concentrate on work. If he inclined to probe and analyse his feelings and thoughts, it was under the influence of vague, confused musings rather than with the purpose of elaborating materials suitable for artistic creation and apt to stimulate the creative faculty within him.

How far he was from having found himself is shown by his 'Impromptu passionné (in memory of Beltof and Liuba)' inspired by Herzen's novel *Who is to blame?*—very popular at the time—in which a kiss given by the heroine, Liuba, to the disillusioned hero, Beltof, reawakens in him the desire to live, but really leads to the supreme disenchantment, because Liuba can never be his. It is a pretty, but immature, quite unoriginal little 'Rêverie' in Schumannesque style.* It was the first work of Mussorgsky which he inscribed to his dear friend Nadejda Opotchinina (see *infra*, chapter IV) so we may surmise that at that time he did not regard it as insignificant. His other compositions of 1859 were two songs, 'The Merry Hour' and 'The leaves rustled sadly'; and 'Kinderscherz ' for piano.* He also outlined, in the autumn, a 'Shamyl's March' for soli, chorus and orchestra (the text in the Georgian language) in honour of a famous Caucasian chief whose surrender to the Russian forces was one of the great events of the day.

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* It was published, edited by Karatyghin, in 1911. The original manuscript is in the Leningrad public library. A copy of it belonging to the publisher, Bessel, bears in Rimsky-Korsakof's handwriting the remark, "How very faulty and unintelligible!"

The 'Impromptu passionné' was composed in October. That same month Mussorgsky, after a discussion on matters of religious doctrine (and also, probably, on more personal matters) with Balakiref wrote to him, first a letter replying to certain of his contentions with regard to religion, and then the next day (19 October):

> You have put forth two suppositions concerning me. Let us first deal with the matter of my mysticism or, rather, as you put it, my mystical moods. As you know, I was, two years ago, or even more recently, very ill.† My trouble was mysticism, coupled with cynical thoughts about the Almighty. I suffered terribly in the country, and things became even worse after my return to town. I succeeded in hiding this from you, but you must have noticed the repercussions of it on my music.‡ I suffered cruelly, and became morbidly sensitive. Then—an effect, no doubt, of distractions or of the fantastic dreams I indulged in—for a long period this mysticism subsided. And, having got into my right mind again, I took steps to do away with it entirely. Of late, I have been striving hard to conquer the obsession, and have partially succeeded. By now, I have proceeded far away from mysticism, and, I hope, for good; it is a frame of mind incompatible with moral development.
>
> With regard to my attitude to you, I must explain all that happened since we first met. At the very outset, I acknowledged your superiority. I saw how much clearer and finer than mine your ideas were. I may, at times, have grown angry with myself or with you, but in my heart I knew that you were in the right: which shows that vanity alone led me to be obstinate in my relations or discussions with you. I am

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* Mussorgsky mentions this piece as composed in 1860 (see *infra* p. 39): but the earliest of several autograph manuscripts of it—which bears the title 'Ugolki' (Puss in the corner) is dated 26 September 1859.

† In point of fact it was in 1858: see *supra*, p. 30.

‡ "This remark", Andreï Rimsky-Korsakof says,[4] "may refer to compositions of 1858 which have not been preserved"—possibly the Sonatas in E flat major and F sharp minor, among others.

greatly indebted to you, Mily, because you succeeded so well in awakening me from my torpor. And later, I came to understand you thoroughly, finding in you, among other things, the echo, and at times, the very germ, of my own thoughts. Our recent relations have brought you so very close to me, that now I trust you in all things. The part of a pasha *à la* Dargomyjsky is too puny and contemptible to be ascribed to you and is, indeed, alien to you. Our discussion the other day originated not in my puerility, but in a malevolence which gets the better of me sometimes—a morbid product of my mind, and the effect of physical causes. I acknowledge that causes of that kind have affected me: but not so mysticism. Thanks to your affectionate and charming letter, I shall be able to make mightier efforts to cast all that filth far away from me.

I am reading books on geology. Most interesting. Fancy: Berlin is built upon a soil consisting entirely of infusoria, masses of them still alive!

There is something very lovable in Mussorgsky's frank acknowledgment of his faults, and something pathetic in his earnest, though rather childish attempts at judicial self-analysis, his endeavours to take himself in hand. It is an open question whether his nervous system was undermined owing to his earlier periods of hard drinking; but there is no indication that he continued to drink during these first years of his musical career. If so, he would probably have told Balakiref quite frankly: for in his letters to him there is no sign of reticence. The sentence about geology may be regarded as characteristic of Mussorgsky's 'studies' of science —and also philosophy.

Borodin met Mussorgsky again in the autumn of that year, at a party.

He had grown far more virile, and was beginning to put on flesh, and nothing in his aspect recalled the quondam officer. His attire, his manners were as dainty as ever, but no trace of foppishness remained. We were introduced to one another, but recognized each other at once. He told me he had resigned his commission, because "he was devoting himself exclusively to music, and to carry on with military service and art jointly was difficult". We started talking music. I was, at that time, a keen admirer of Mendelssohn, and knew practically nothing of Schumann. He, having already joined Balakiref's circle, lived in an atmosphere of musical innovations of which I had not the faintest idea. Our host suggested that he and I should play Mendelssohn's A minor Symphony together. Mussorgsky made a wry face, but agreed, on the understanding that he would be let off the slow movement, "which", he said, "was not in the least symphonic, but just a 'song without words' or something of the kind, transcribed for the orchestra". We played the first movement and the scherzo. Then he began to talk with enthusiasm of Schumann's symphonies which I did not know. He played bits from the one in E flat major. When he had reached the middle part, he stopped, saying: "Now begins the musical mathematics". All this was new to me and delighted me. Seeing that I was greatly interested, he played something else, also new to me. He informed me that he too composed music, and started playing to me a Scherzo of his [probably that in B flat.] Coming to the trio, he muttered between his teeth: "There you are: Eastern stuff!" I was thoroughly amazed at these unaccustomed musical elements, whose existence I had not suspected before. I cannot say that I really liked them then and there: their novelty rather perplexed me. And I must confess that his professed intention of devoting himself to music left me sceptical at first. I thought it was a bit of boasting. But having heard his Scherzo, I wondered: shall I believe it or not?

This pen-portrait does not suggest ill health or nervous disorder; nor does the information provided by Sofia Fortunato (1851-1929; *née* Stassova, Vladimir Stassof's daughter) writing, it is true, from memory sixty-odd years after the event. The greater part of her recollections, it will be noticed, refer to a later period.

My acquaintance with him began towards the end of the 'fifties. He had just resigned his commission and resumed civilian garb. He was of medium height, still quite slim, with small hands and feet, dark wavy hair, very elegant and well groomed. The head was peculiar, biggish; the face biggish too, with big, bright, slightly bulging eyes, their brightness enhanced by the contrasting dark complexion and dark hair and beard. His manners were gentle and refined. Everything in him betokened breeding and refinement. I repeat the word, because it characterizes him most appropriately. When he came to our home, we children were always eager to listen to his polished, flowing talk. All of us had the impression that he held his own with the most progressive and enlightened of the people who used to come to our house. My father and our uncles were leaders of progressive thinking, and their circle consisted exclusively of progressively minded people. To Mussorgsky, very young, very live and eager, such a circle was what water is to a mill-wheel. He took his place in it, diffidently at first, then boldly, and was soon given full privileges of membership. Then a time came when the circle's interest began to centre in music. This led to his playing a leading part in it. Although but a young child, I was deeply impressed by his personality. He, who seemed at first sight so brilliant and shallow, would stir the deepest feelings and thoughts with his music and his profound readings whether the music he sang or played was his own or not. How wonderful it was when all those distinguished visitors introduced their new compositions! Heated debates often followed. Then Mussorgsky would stand his ground, never conceding a point, never displaying any vanity, never uttering a rude, or even a sharp, word. Few artists are as capable as he was of seeing other people's point of view while holding such strong views themselves.

A photograph taken either in 1859 or a little earlier shows Mussorgsky in civilian clothes, still very slim and beardless, standing by a piece of studio furniture (complete with vase) beside which his brother Philaret, still in uniform, is sitting. His aspect is hale, virile and simple. He appears very much at ease, wearing a humorous, slightly sardonic expression. The chin, which in all later portraits is hidden by the beard, is good: the mouth very big. The eyes seem neither big nor bulging. Otherwise the photograph confirms Borodin's description, and also—so far as it applies to Mussorgsky in 1859—Sofia Fortunato's.

On 11 January 1860, Mussorgsky made his public début as a composer: his Scherzo in B flat was given at a concert of the Russian Musical Society, Anton Rubinstein conducting. He owed this first opportunity not to Rubinstein, as stated in the autobiography, but to the recommendation of Dimitri Stassof, one of the founders of the Society. The Scherzo was well received. Serof, the composer, who was also a critic, praised it in the St. Petersburg *Musical and Theatrical Messenger*.

So, things were beginning to look really hopeful. Unfortunately, a new outburst of illness soon followed. On 10 February Mussorgsky wrote to Balakiref:

> Thank Heaven, I am beginning to recover after cruel, very cruel sufferings physical and mental. You remember, dear friend, that one day, two years ago, after we had been reading *Manfred*, I was electrified by the sufferings of that lofty mind, and said to you: "I wish I were a Manfred!" (I was very much a child then). Well, apparently, Fate had decided to grant me my wish. I became literally "Manfredized". My mind killed my body. Now I must resort to all kinds of antidotes. Dear Mily, I know you love me. For God's sake, in our talks, strive to keep me in hand and do not let me collapse. I am compelled to give up, for a time, my musical occupations and all intellectual strain in order to get better. My recipe is: All for the sake of physical welfare,

even if the mental side has to be sacrificed. I know the origin of my nervous disorder: it was not onanism only. The main causes are youth, inordinate excitability, a fierce longing to know everything, excessive indulgence in self-criticism, and an idealism so excessive that my dreams materialize in images and actions. I am barely twenty, my physique is not sufficiently developed to keep pace with my impetuous spirit, while this spirit saps my bodily strength. Distractions, peace so far as possible, bathing and gymnastics ought to save me.

To-day my brother and I went to see the ballet *Pâquerette*, a charming one, with many pretty scenes. But the music, Mily, Pugni's music! It is terrible, really terrible! The ballet produced a strange impression upon me. I felt unwell during the performance. As soon as I got home I had to seek my bed. Dreams came to me, very oppressive, but so intoxicating, and inducing in me so sweet a passivity, that I felt I could easily slip away into death.

This, fortunately, marked the end of my ordeal. Now I am better, or, at least, quite at peace. My reason for writing to you was not a longing to confess: I was asked to invite you to dinner with us all on Saturday. But, having taken pen in hand, and finding myself thinking affectionately of you, involuntarily I have let myself go.

Obviously, he had been going through a violent pubescence crisis—maybe not the first, although we have no record of an earlier one. The problem of his sexual disposition and attitude to sex remains shrouded in mystery. The scanty data available will be surveyed presently. The above account shows that once again he overcame the attack (of which pubescence is unlikely to have been the only cause) quickly; and that his notions of the proper way towards a complete recovery were sound enough.

The first token of his recovery (a temporary one, unfortunately) was a remodelling of the temple scene in *Œdipus*, which he inscribed to Balakiref. The manuscript is dated 1 March. From May to August he stayed at the Shilovskys' home at Gliebovo. Most of the time he was ill and unable, he explained to Balakiref, to do much work.

But [he continued] I collected materials which I shall need later. *Œdipus* and the little Sonata have progressed. The Sonata is nearly finished: and to *Œdipus* I have added two choral numbers: Andante, B flat minor and Allegro, E flat major. I have also been commissioned to do a very interesting piece of work: to be finished by next summer: a whole act on the Bare Mountain (from Mengden's drama *The Witch*) a witches' sabbath, various episodes of wizardry, a triumphal march of all this scum, and, by way of finale, the glorification of the

> sabbath. The libretto is very good. I have a few ideas; and I may turn out something quite good. I have also done a few small things 'Lord of my days' which I regard as quite satisfactory,* and 'Kinderscherz'.
>
> You will rejoice to hear of the change which has taken place within me, and which, for sure, is reflected in my music. My mind is strong, I have turned my thoughts to realities, my youthful fire has cooled down and of mysticism no trace remains. My last mystical composition is the B flat minor chorus for *Œdipus*. I am, thank God, thoroughly cured. I am setting all my little musical trespasses in order. A new period of my musical life has begun.

And, indeed, he was to enjoy a spell of good health, mental and physical. A letter, of 31 December, 1860 (unpublished),[4] from Balakiref to a friend says: "Mussorgsky looks thoroughly fit and happy. He has composed an Allegro,† and he feels that he has already done quite a lot for art in general, and Russian art in particular."

The " commission " which Mussorgsky had received (presumably from the author of *The Witch* himself, of whom nothing is known except Mussorgsky's mention of him) must have awakened high hopes in his heart, or at least made him feel that the world at large was beginning to take him seriously as a composer. Nothing came of it, however, except, years later, the tone-poem, *A Night on the Bare Mountain.*

Then, on 9 November, he informed Balakiref that Dimitri Stassof had been able to arrange for a performance of a chorus from *Œdipus* at the Russian Music Society, but that he himself, owing to the Committee's lack of enthusiasm, had decided to withdraw the work: "Stassof told me that they wish me to attend a rehearsal, and if after that I decide that the chorus can be performed publicly, it will be performed. Without showing anything of my feelings, I replied that the chorus, *agitato*, being very short, would not be effective unless preceded by the Andante. So I asked that my manuscript be returned. Why should that pack of idiots have the cheek to teach me my business? I am, moreover, delighted to have avoided a clash with Rubinstein. I am sure you will approve."

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* This has not been preserved.

† The Allegro in question—a mere exercise in composition which, played at Balakiref's home the following year, pleased both him and Rimsky-Korsakof (who had just joined the circle)—is preserved in autograph rough draft for piano duet. The manuscript is dated 8 March 1860, and bears the odd note, in Mussorgsky's handwriting "I [in the masculine] have taken a husband"—probably a relic of some mild joke or incident.

Throughout his life this was his instinctive attitude to criticism from people whom he did not regard (at least temporarily) as worth bothering about. Later, he became quick to take umbrage —at times quite justifiably—at criticism even from friends: but for a long time he continued to accept Balakiref's verdicts on musical matters as final. He accepted quite meekly Balakiref's objections to the transcription for piano duet he had made of the *King Lear* Overture. He had been given the job in September 1859, and had carried it out to his own thorough satisfaction, but not to Balakiref's, judging from the following letter—which shows how very eager the twenty-one-year-old pupil was to please his twenty-year-old master:

> Thank you, Mily, for having let me off composing a new Scherzo. My frame of mind is not in the least *scherzoso*, but would be suitable to the perpetrating of an impressive Andante. I shall do exercises in part-writing—three parts to begin with, and turn out something decent. This will provide a seasonable stimulus: for, if my harmonies are "balderdash"* it is high time they should cease to be so. Do not be very angry about your *Lear* Overture. After all, it is my first serious attempt at a transcription of that kind—my transcription for piano solo of Glinka's 'Spanish Overture' does not count!

During that year, Mussorgsky's output, apart from exercises in composition, the lost 'Lord of my days' and the revisions of the temple scene from *Œdipus* and of the 'Kinderscherz', consisted of only one not very characteristic song, entitled 'You disdain my words of love', inscribed to Maria Shilovskaya. The list of his compositions during the following two years is equally short. In January 1861 he went to Moscow for no known reason—possibly, Andreï Rimsky-Korsakof surmises,[4] attracted by the presence there of Maria Shilovskaya. A spell of terrible frost, during which he dared not face the return journey, made him extend his stay. He devoted a good deal of time to work, and spent most of his evenings in the congenial company of new friends he had made. On 13 January he wrote to Balakiref:

> I am engaged on a fine and serious piece of work: the Andante and Scherzo of a Symphony in D major. The Andante will be in F sharp minor, and the Scherzo in B major is already in hand. I found here Schumann's *Fantasie* inscribed to Liszt—feeble stuff; and what about the "fantastisch" at the beginning? Well, it is his Op. 17, composed

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* Probably an epithet applied to them by Balakiref.

when he was infatuated with Mendelssohn. I played his (Schumann's) Sonata in F sharp minor. The Introduction is not particularly good; the best parts are in two Allegro movements, especially the first. I got hold of a very bad transcription of Schubert's C major Symphony. Demidof (who is probably coming to see me to-night) does not know it, so I'll play it to him.

I am surrounded with very nice people, most of them former university students, live and active youths. We spend evenings settling all possible questions: history, government, art, chemistry, and so on. I enjoy it all.

And then, three days later:

The Scherzo is ready, except for the second trio, on which I am still at work. It is a big Scherzo, really symphonic, inscribed (as the whole symphony is) to the companionship of the Wednesdays, our *jour-fixe* [the day of the weekly meetings at Balakiref's house]. Demidof came to see me. He is a likeable youth, and very keen. I played Schubert's C major Symphony to him, and the tears nearly came to his eyes. He longs to hear more of it. He is still very young, but the good opinion you have of him is fully justified. I am delighted to know such a man.

Nikolaï Rubinstein, Anton's worthy relative, is compelling all home-bred Moscow pianists to play Chopin *pièces de salon*: what a choice! Very stupid! I am forging ahead. May God grant me strength. I am able to work, but I get tired very quickly.

17 January.

The Scherzo is quite finished, written down for piano in nice clear draft. I hope to submit it for judgment on one of our Wednesdays. I intend to leave for home on Friday.

The Demidof mentioned here had been one of Mussorgsky's comrades in the Guards. Meeting him again in Moscow, he found him so gifted that he advised him to come to study in Petersburg, and even considered inviting him to stay in the family flat—an idea on which Philaret put his veto.

Two days later, Modest gave further impressions of his friend which must have caused Balakiref to rub his eyes or to laugh in his sleeve, so much did the tone of the letter suggest a greybeard talking of a mere stripling:

He may go to Petersburg, for in Moscow he has few opportunities to hear good music. He is still immature; music has barely touched him yet, but he promises well. He is quick at grasping the course of musical ideas, often spontaneously noticing their transformations and developments. In short, he is endowed with a sense of musical logic. As regards aesthetics he is still callow: but, after all, only thoroughly formed musicians have a conscious aesthetic sense. For the time being he inclines towards Mendelssohn—towards sentimentality turned sour. He will outgrow the inclination: we all liked Mendelssohn at some time or other. But already he cannot endure Chopin!* Had I known I should have to stay in Moscow so long I should have brought other works unknown to him. Here I managed to find only the Schumann sonata, Schubert's C major Symphony, and Beethoven's F major (Russian) Quartet. All these I played to him.

Meanwhile, Balakiref, who for various reasons disapproved of the stay in Moscow, had written to Mussorgsky objecting to his new friends and, it would seem, criticising the symphony in advance. So Mussorgsky went on to reply to his censures:

Of course it is difficult to form an opinion of my Scherzo on the strength of what I wrote to you: but you shall see it, and then pass judgment. I am destroying the first trio and shall compose another. Now let us deal with that matter of "benighted atmosphere" on which you lay such stress. Obviously, your remarks on my partiality for "benighted people" can mean only one thing: that "birds of a feather flock together". So, logically, I too must be benighted. But I do not agree that my friends are benighted. And, if they are, I cannot understand why you think that to breathe their atmosphere should affect me, or to breathe my atmosphere could affect them: I know by experience (by experience, because we have known one another five years) that you regard me as rather benighted. And so you are prejudiced against my music because of your opinion of me generally. You say I am sinking into the mire and must pull myself out of it. If I have talent, I shall not sink into the mire. If not, it does not matter two pins whether I sink or not. To be quite frank, I did sink into the mire once —not musically speaking, but morally. That's all over. I'll tell you some day—it was an *affaire de femme*. One thing I feel, anyhow: that your letter was the outcome of unjustified pique. It is time for you to cease regarding me as a child who must be kept on leading-strings lest he should fall. That's my reply to your letter, Mily, a fiery, unrestrained letter for which I thank you, nevertheless: I feared you were not going to write to me at all.

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* This sentence lends colour to Rimsky-Korsakof's assertion that Balakiref "used to liken Chopin to a nervous society lady". But Cui, in his Recollections,[9] declares that "all the members of the circle loved Liszt and Berlioz, and worshipped Chopin and Glinka". Liapunof[9] quotes a letter in which Balakiref says "I create an impression when I play Chopin's Nocturnes for ladies, or my own early pieces, which are no good at all. I am not saying that Chopin is a composer for ladies. Some of his works are admirable: but these do not please audiences."

Balakiref had been genuinely upset by his vision of Mussorgsky "sinking into the mire". He had even written to Philaret in order to find out when Modest would be returning to Petersburg. The cloud was soon dispelled, however. He obviously took Mussorgsky's strong and dignified reply in good part: for a note of Mussorgsky's to Balakiref dated 6 February and couched in warmly affectionate terms shows that, by then, harmony was already restored.

Towards the end of the winter Constantine Liadof, whom Mussorgsky had met at the Shilovskys' home, decided to include the chorus from the temple scene in *Œdipus* in the programme of a concert given by the management of the Imperial Theatres. The performance took place on 6/18 April 1861. It attracted little notice; but Mussorgsky must have felt that Liadof's initiative had shown the committee of the Russian Music Society the error of their ways.

By that time, an event had taken place which was seriously to affect the whole course of his life: on 19 February/3 March the imperial ukase abolishing serfdom was promulgated. This spelt great difficulties, and often disaster, for the people who drew all their income from landed property. It became necessary to reorganize speedily on a new basis. Philaret took charge of things. More than once Modest had to help him, or even take his place. Philaret was not a good business man. He ventured into operations which ended in the loss of practically the whole patrimony. And so the liberation of the serfs, which must have caused Modest great joy, put an end to the comfortable, carefree life the family had enjoyed so far.

A few brief notes written to Balakiref in the course of the year show that much of Mussorgsky's time was taken up by business matters. He spent the winter at Karevo, for reasons connected with the administration of the estate. There he composed an Intermezzo, which he remodelled later, and of which several versions exist (see *infra*, chapter V). This, and a sketch for an *Alla marcia notturna* for orchestra are the only two extant of his compositions of 1861. Of the Andante and Scherzo of the projected symphony not a trace remains. According to Andreï Rimsky-Korsakof[4] the Scherzo may have been the one referred to in an unpublished letter of 22 April 1863 from Cui to Rimsky-Korsakof:

"Modinka has given utterance to a musical monster: a kind of trio to his Scherzo—a really formidable monster, with unconscionably long church chants, and his usual pedal-points, and so on, all of it obscure, clumsy and not at all a trio."

The sketch for the *Alla marcia notturna* consists of forty-one bars. It bears the note: " essay in instrumentation. Lesson on Wednesday. Scored 14 March 1861". Who was to give him the lesson, Karatyghin[16] says, is not known. It was certainly not Balakiref. Possibly Mussorgsky thought it expedient to go to someone else for extra tuition.

Early in 1862, the family was compelled to give up the well-appointed flat in Petersburg. The mother settled at Karevo. Philaret and his wife took a small flat where Modest came to live after a stay at Volok for a cure. From Volok he wrote to Balakiref, on 11 March 1862:

> I am working on the Andante. Here I am, in comfortable quarters, and in great spirits, comparatively speaking. I lead a regular life: in bed by eleven, up at eight, and this is good for me. Snow, cutting winds, frost. I await the spring impatiently, to start my cure. It is time I took myself in hand. Enough of vegetating: I must work and act. A change of surroundings is bound to be refreshing: the past becomes clear, stands out sharply, and one becomes able to analyse one's experiences boldly. This is what I am doing. I see now that although I have never shirked work, my Russian laziness has prevented my achieving much. I have no special confidence in my talent, nor do I doubt it. I shall work as hard as I can, but I am still casting around for the kind of work I can do most usefully.
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> Studying myself, I notice a kind of slackness, of softness: what you have called "wet clay". Well, this is unpleasant: for wet clay takes the imprint of all fingers that touch it, be they clean or dirty. I will conquer this deplorable weakness.
>
> Do not regard this letter as an Andante on the strength of its opening sentence. I have been having trouble with the second theme of the Finale. Maybe things will improve with the coming of spring. Farewell until my next letter—provided you have not found this one too tedious (if you have, let me know, and I shall take measures). I don't want you to regard me as a tedious correspondent.

Balakiref did not find the letter tedious. Referring to it in a letter to their common friend Arsenief, he paid Mussorgsky a tribute which felicitously sums up the impression Mussorgsky made on all who knew him. "I have just heard from Modinka.

He is awaiting the coming of spring. Although he is not in good health nor in a buoyant frame of mind, now and then one can almost see his usual smile peeping out between the lines. I envy him!"

Other letters from Volok show Mussorgsky's spirits steadily rising:

> The Andante is ready. I am at work on the Finale. I suppose that springtime will bring the birth throes and the child will come into the world. For the time being, a little Sonata in D major is taking shape. I've started on the Scherzo (in B minor). The first movement and the first Scherzo of the Beethoven quartet [the piano transcription of Op. 130] are ready. I hope to have the whole quartet ready for our next season. I am in good health, mental and physical; and I work without effort. Just now, my landlady's children are at the piano, rending the air with all manners of "accords possibles et impossibles".*
>
> This is called taking a music lesson. I am reading a most interesting book on nature generally, and human nature in particular. It is entitled *Philosophie de la Nature*.† I like it because the author does not use technical jargon. It is the work of a real human being, who expresses himself clearly, freely, and who knows his subject thoroughly. Weather conditions compel me to stay at home to-day. I have a companion, a hot-headed Prussian, the children's teacher.‡ He has a fine head and bristles with energy and activity. His Spartan nature puts to shame my Athenian indolence. He drags me out through waist-deep snow, saying I need air and exercise, and indeed these *promenades monstres* are doing me good. He plays the piano quite nicely, and understands music. He often treats me to Bach fugues (O Dargopiekh!)§
>
> Of these I specially appreciate the one in E major, together with the Prelude. The piano is a semitone low in pitch, so it all comes out in E flat: I don't like the key of E major. I have been studying him carefully, and I like him. He compels me to reconsider my opinion of Germans in Russia and Germans in general (except, of course, for scientists).

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* Probably a quotation from a French treatise on harmony.

† By Holbach.

‡ Godet[8] and Savelova[3] suppose, quite reasonably, that his may have been the Georg von Madeweiss mentioned in the autobiography.

§ One of the many contemptuous nicknames given to Dargomyjsky at the time (see *supra* p. 22). The exclamation suggests that Dargomyjsky had little use for Bach's fugues.

CHAPTER IV

MUSSORGSKY IN 1862

His talents, character, and disposition—His immaturity in composition—Early works surveyed—Dissimilar versions of songs

LET us now try to draw, if not a full picture of Mussorgsky during the period surveyed—far too many important components are lacking for such a task to be possible; and there is practically no hope that fuller information will ever come forth—at least a reasonably faithful one.

He was equipped at the start with a disposition for music (but, so far as we can tell, this was in no wise out of the common except maybe in the matter of piano playing) and also with a capacity for improvization as to which we have no testimony except that of the autobiography. We know that he eventually became a splendid pianist. Cui, according to Lapshin's testimony,[16] held that if Mussorgsky had further developed his gifts as a pianist he might have risen even higher than Anton Rubinstein. Rimsky-Korsakof[15] and others praised his playing highly. We have testimonies referring to a later period, as to the quickness of his ear and the excellence of his musical memory; and there is no reason to suppose that these qualities were not present from the first.

He soon began to display talent as a singer and amateur actor, without having received training in either art. The point is worth noting, for it shows that the rare sense of intonation, gesture and character to which his mature work testifies was inborn. As a composer, and even as an all-round musician, he gave no promise of rising above the level of a gifted and successful amateur. As a boy, he had a taste for study which, had it been encouraged, might have developed and become methodical: but all he actually did was to read, eagerly but, it would seem, erratically, instructive or pesudo-instructive books on all kinds of subjects. His letters to Balakiref (no letters of his to others prior to 1863 are known) show him endowed with an inquiring mind and a lively, but unrestrained imagination; a bent for self-analysis on fairly reasonable and well-balanced lines, and enough will-power to put up, at least for a time, a game fight against the consequences of pernicious influences and the onslaughts of nervous disorders.

It is impossible to determine how far the drink habit acquired during his school and army years contributed to the coming of the bodily and mental ailments described in his letters. Failing medical evidence and knowledge of his physiological antecedents, it is equally impossible to say whether the two painful puberty crises he underwent—one mental (1858), the other (1860) unquestionably physical—affected the further course of his life.

Of his sexual disposition and life so little is known that no conclusion suggests itself with any degree of likelihood. There were in his nature a few traits which one might incline to regard as feminine: certain naïvely soft, ingratiating, clinging ways now humorous, now wistful, an eagerness to be liked and understood, and so on. But it would be more accurate to regard these as childlike. He remained, in certain respects, childlike all his life. Moreover, these traits were exclusively psychological; and there is no reason to complicate already complex problems by supposing, without a scrap of evidence, that they had any counterpart in his physical make-up.

He is, among the great composers of vocal and dramatic music, one of the very few in whose works the expression of the emotions of love plays but a small and not really significant part. This fact, coupled with his professed horror of marriage (see *infra*, p. 65), has given rise to the notion that these emotions were foreign to him. Yet Karatyghin, in the course of investigations carried out at Mussorgsky's birthplace, heard that in his youth he had been in love with a cousin of his, who died young; and that, by her request, his letters to her had been placed in her coffin.[16] Later, according to an unpublished letter from Stassof to Findeisen,[4] he was, as already mentioned, infatuated with the brilliant Maria Shilovskaya and, after that, with an opera singer, Latysheva by name. Andreï Rimsky-Korsakof remarks that these were "mere passing fancies, very different from the strong and deep feeling which attracted him to Nadejda Opotchinina", an attachment in all likelihood platonic, that was to endure until the end of her life. She was his senior by eighteen years.

He was reticent as to his own feelings on all such matters. No mention occurs in his correspondence of the grief caused to him by Nadejda's death in 1874. And a similar instinct, on another plane, led him to dislike sex talk, earnest or jocular. His reference to "having sunk into the mire in an affair with a woman" and to Stassof's coarse humour apropos marriage are characteristic.

Another piece of information given by Stassof to Findeisen was that Mussorgsky suffered from a congenital malformation of the sexual organs, which prevented his leading a normal sexual life although it did not altogether preclude his having sexual intercourse. One or two non-Russian authors, notably Godet, have expressed the suspicion that he may have been inclined to homosexuality. In reply to an enquiry from the present writer, Andreï Rimsky-Korsakof said that no indication to that effect was known to exist, and no rumour or suspicion had ever arisen in Russia.

Despite a few baffling features, his nature was not complex in the least. Complexity—or, rather, many-sidedness—manifested itself later. Yet, even by 1862, Lapshin remarks:[16]

> A mental duality similar to that which Pereverzef diagnosed in Dostoevsky was discernible in him. He was both a dreamer of lofty dreams and a cynical sceptic; a man instinct with inordinate pride and "the humble Mussorianin" as he used to call himself, punning on his Christian name, Modest. Signs of consecutive or simultaneous manifestations of his two natures occur in his letter of 19 October 1859 to Balakiref, which reminds one of Dostoevsky's "At the very moments when I was in the mood most suitable to the perception of the lofty and beautiful, I would commit some shameful deed".

Lapshin probably goes further than most analysts of Mussorgsky's psychology would be prepared to go on the strength of the evidence available. He may have been thinking of what is known of him in later years; and even so the term 'cynical', as generally understood, is hardly one which seems to meet the case. There is, however, a measure of truth in the notion. A definition of Mussorgsky's nature is not easy to arrive at. For the time being, let us rest content with noting that he was sensitive, impulsive, demonstrative and excitable; amenable to influences in certain respects, in others thoroughly impervious. The most mysterious problem remains the change that took place within him in 1857-8 when he decided to devote himself wholly to composition. Acknowledging that he loved music and was interested in it, we remain unable to determine exactly what force impelled him to take this decisive step.

We should, of course, not exaggerate the importance of the step from the practical point of view. When he took it he never dreamed that he would ever be compelled to earn a living: anyhow, a military career in a crack regiment would not, in itself, have constituted a better insurance against that eventuality than composition. And, well born and well off, he would still hope to enjoy, after his resignation, a large measure of the social and other indirect advantages that fell to the officers' lot. Still, it was a momentous decision to take, considering that prospects for young Russian composers were not at all encouraging, the musical world, and especially the influential fraction of it, inclining to look down on native talent and to follow Western fashions in art as in most other matters, and that he himself had no particular musical goal in view.

Except for his story of his youthful improvizations, nothing shows that he was tormented by a desire to express himself in music; up to the age of eighteen he seems to have composed nothing but one polka. No symptoms of a wish to follow a definite line in composition, or of individuality are to be detected in anything he wrote before reaching the age of twenty-four; nor do we see that any particular kind of music, or the music of any one composer, stirred his imagination and ambition. The notion of writing dramatic music appealed to him, if only vaguely, but, despite his vivid impressions when he first visited Moscow, he asserted no early tendency to musical nationalism or realism.

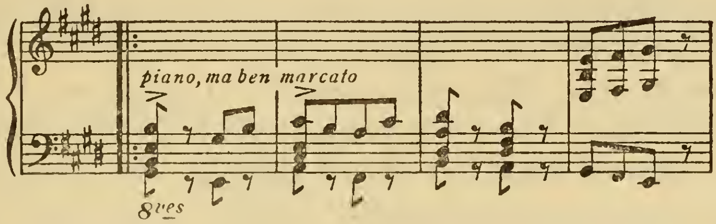
Of the former, however, the seed had been sown by the experience of his childhood in his native countryside, and lay dormant within him. We may admit that an inborn predisposition to musical realism was there too. His early experiences of music, the atmosphere of the keen, active little circle in which he moved, and especially the 'magnetic personality' of his teacher Balakiref, provided the first stimuli, potent though vague.

Balakiref succeeded in making him work more or less methodically and long to "write correctly", but, as already said, there is in his style no single trace of Balakiref's direct influence: which is not surprising considering how different from Balakiref's his aims were to be. Later, although interested in knowing what his colleagues thought of his works, and eager to win their approval, when all was said and done he usually obeyed his own instinct. In the case of *Boris Godunof* he had, to a certain extent, to follow for purely practical reasons the advice of others; and the question arises whether he was not coaxed or bullied into altering things which he had carried out to his own thorough satisfaction. His advisers' point of view was, as a rule, so different from his own that at times they were totally incapable of seeing the reasons for his departure from usage, and they seldom approved, except with all manner of reservations, of anything he had done. This is one of the many facts ignored by the writers on Russian music who contributed to spread the legend of 'The Russian Five', a legend created chiefly by the writings of Stassof and Cui, and representing the 'Five'—Balakiref, Cui, Mussorgsky, Borodin and Rimsky-Korsakof—as united by the strong bond of a common ideal, resolved to stand or fall together, and working towards a common goal in perfect mutual understanding and harmony. Even Balakiref had little faith in Mussorgsky's ability throughout the years during which he was striving to find himself. Mussorgsky must have felt far more isolated than has hitherto been realized.

As regards his opinions on music, Lapshin[16] rightly points out that it is unreasonable and unfair to quote bits culled from his letters as if they were part and parcel of a treatise on aesthetics or a carefully considered profession of faith and not just impulsive, cursory talk in which a certain amount of exaggeration was only natural. This applies even to the views he expressed after having reached maturity and independence. And, as it is impossible to tell how far his early views corresponded to actual feeling and how far they merely reflected those of his friends, to attempt to make capital out of them would be even more foolish. All that we are justified in admitting is that his interest in the music of Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, and also Gluck, was genuine. Schubert's and Schumann's influenced him most at the start. He had begun to learn from Glinka, Berlioz, Liszt but, as already said, Dargomyjsky's influenced him only later. His preserved output for these early years consists of nine songs; the B flat major Scherzo scored with Balakiref's help; a first version, for piano, of the Intermezzo; 'Souvenir d'Enfance', 'Impromptu passionné', and 'Kinderscherz' for piano; the Allegro for piano duet; and one chorus for *Œdipus* (another was used in *Salammbo*). All these works show him endowed with very little technique, and far from having achieved a distinctive style. The *Œdipus* chorus is fine, but unoriginal. Most of the instrumental pieces are insignificant. The themes of the B flat Scherzo are commonplace, insufficiently differentiated, and poorly worked out; the 'oriental' trio is graceful and poetic, but clumsily linked to the repeat by an augmented triad (B flat, D, F sharp) which mars the effectiveness of the return from D major to B flat.

The themes of the Scherzo in C sharp minor are more significant and better differentiated: the second:

Ex. 1

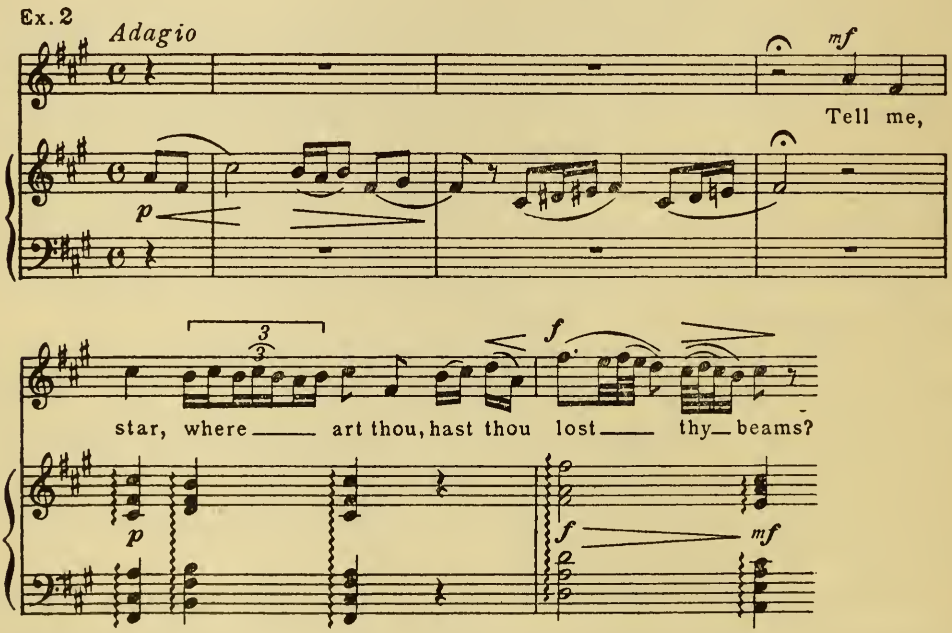


whose rhythm is that of a Russian folk dance (one which Mussorgsky used again in the revolution scene in *Boris Godunof*) is spirited and characteristic, but neither is turned to good account. Again the trio, as 'Eastern' as that of the B flat Scherzo, is the best thing in the piece. The 'Kinderscherz' is graceful and Schumannesque. One interesting detail is a sudden interruption of the music's easy, undulating flow by eleven incisive bars that lead to the trio, almost a miniature anticipation of an effect in Balakiref's *Islamey* composed ten years later. It is probably the outcome of some humorously descriptive intention—the notion, maybe, of the child showing temper before settling down to an imposed task. The trio is a kind of *fileuse* in 3/8 time, eighty-five bars long and rather monotonous. The final coda is brilliant and imaginative. In connection with this earliest example of Mussorgsky's descriptive music, it may be noted that the Intermezzo, too, was inspired by a picturesque scene he had witnessed (see *infra*, pp. 74–5) In all these pieces his chief aims seem to be grace and prettiness. Nothing is rugged, nothing venturesome even on a small scale: nothing suggests the later Mussorgsky.

Cui's description of the trio of his Scherzo for the projected Symphony in D major, and especially his allusion to the church chants used in it, suggest that there Mussorgsky had proceeded farther away from the beaten track—perhaps experimenting on the very lines he ultimately followed, and especially in the use of traditional vernacular elements.

He did far better with some of the songs. The earliest, 'Where art thou, little star', exists, as already mentioned, in two versions: one with piano accompaniment, dated 1857, the other with orchestral accompaniment, and different in many important respects.* Both the autograph manuscripts are clear copies representing two different schemes of treatment, each in its final form. The differences are too great to be regarded as mere corrections, not great enough to point to a change of conception (as is the case for instance with the two versions of Liszt's 'Wer nie sein Brot'). And so the very first of Mussorgsky's songs sets the strange problem which arises again with regard to 'King Saul' a song composed in 1863, and especially to portions of the second act of *Boris Godunof.* In its first version, modal in character, Eastern in colour, with its beautiful supple melodic line (in which many ornaments occur) and its subtle, sensitive accompaniment, the song is most attractive. A point of special interest is the use of a variable scale—one which may be defined, provisionally, as that of F sharp minor in which D sharp and E sharp alternate with D natural and E natural, but not in the same way as in the usual melodic minor. (The use of variable scales, a very important feature of Mussorgsky's music, will be discussed in chapter XVII). The orchestral version, which has additional music and bears the delightfully childish note: "my little song, orchestrated by my own self", is less poetic, less satisfying. The melodic line, much simplified and shorn of its coloratura, is less shapely, less varied, less bold in its sweep:

Ex. 2



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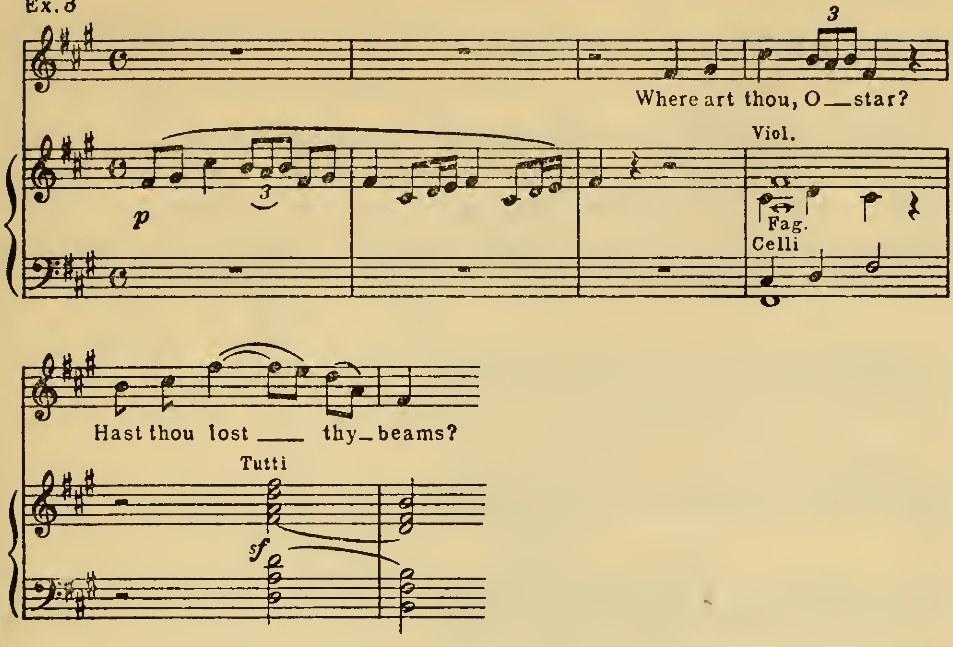
* This is published, with the accompaniment transcribed for piano, in the Lamm edition of *Years of Youth* (Moscow, 1931).

Ex. 3

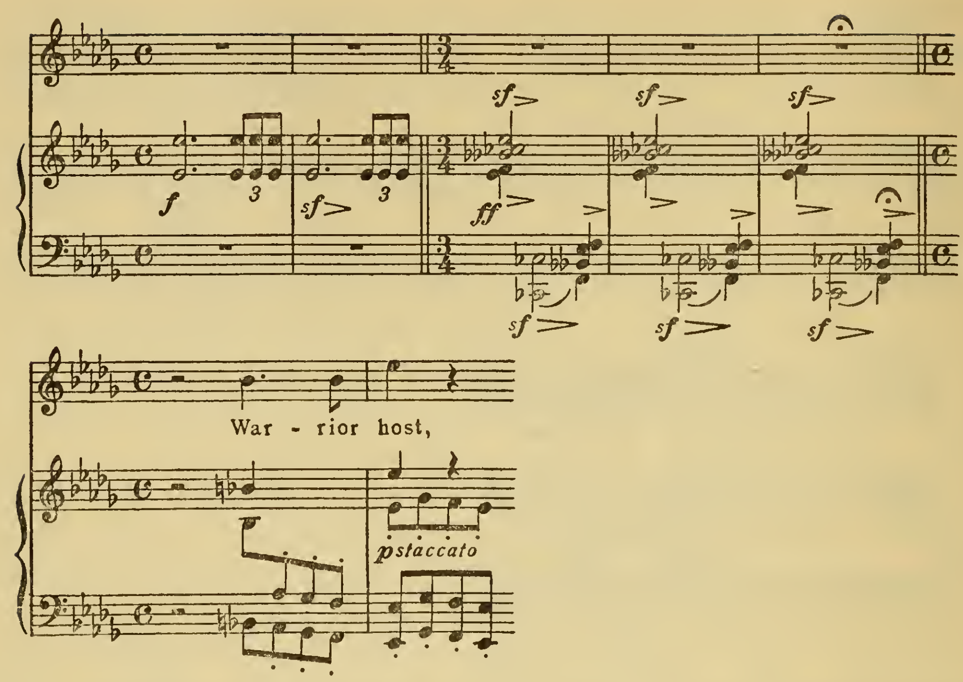


Everywhere else the changes result in impoverishment. The modal character is less marked, the harmonies and cadences are more ordinary. It is impossible to imagine that Mussorgsky acted upon Balakiref's advice. In fact, were the manuscript not dated, one might well believe that the orchestral version was a first attempt, and the other the outcome of helpful suggestions from Balakiref. In short, this strange problem remains insoluble.

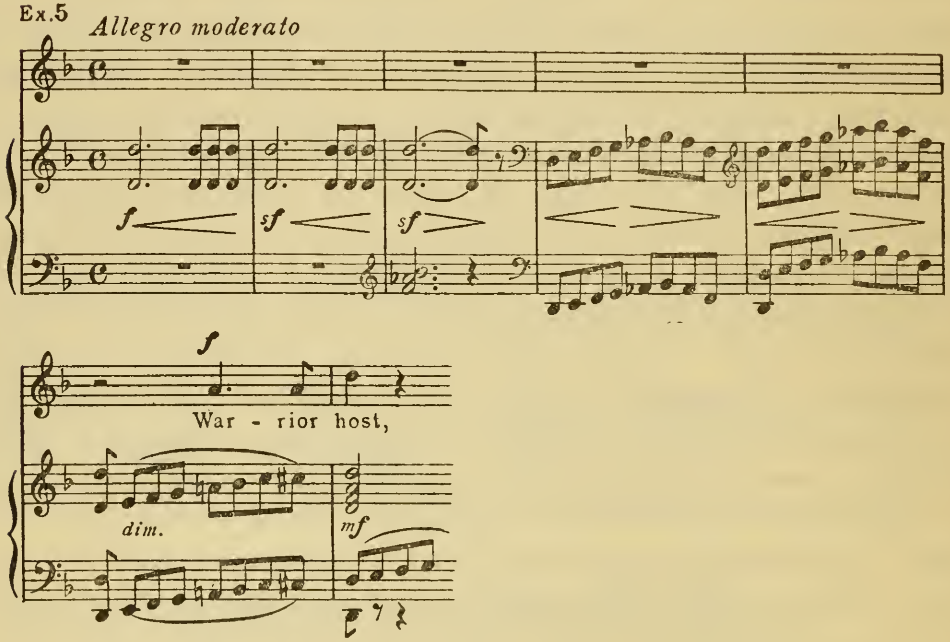
Equally baffling is the case of 'King Saul'. Although this song does not belong to the period under survey, it may be useful to compare its two versions forthwith. One, which we may label version B, was published in 1871. The other (version A) remained in manuscript, coming to light in 1909 only. Version B is far smoother, more conventional, less vivid in colouring than version A, which was conceived as a dramatic scene rather than as a song, and although written for voice and piano, intended for voice and orchestra. But Mussorgsky never carried out the scoring. Two quotations will suffice to show the nature of the differences.

Clearly, the differences are in the execution, not in the conception. The rugged style of version A and the more conventional rhetoric of version B aim at achieving the very same kind of effects. Both are effective, but A is far more interesting musically because of its boldly experimental character, and dramatically stronger; there can be no question but that Mussorgsky displays individuality and attempts, not unsuccessfully, to strike a new and characteristic

Ex. 4


sf
ff
f
3
p staccato
War - rior host,

Ex. 5


Allegro moderato
f
sf
dim.
mf
War - rior host,

note.* Many other composers, setting the words to music in 1863, might have turned out something more or less similar to version B: but how many—apart, maybe, from Liszt—would have given us an equivalent of A?

It is, of course, possible to hold the view that A represents

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* According to Riesemann[12] "to prefer it implies a peculiar conception of music, which unfortunately has crept into certain writings on Mussorgsky."

Mussorgsky's own inspiration in the raw and B a toning down, a reduction to order and correctness, effected probably according to suggestions from outside. There is no evidence either way. The fact that B, and not A, was eventually selected for publication justifies the surmise that it came after A, and may be considered as denoting Mussorgsky's spontaneous preference for the smoother version. Maybe, when turning his 'dramatic scene' into a song with piano accompaniment, he felt that a more subdued scheme would be more suitable, and also decided to lessen difficulties of execution. The question remains, how did he, at a few months' interval at most, come to turn out two settings which ninety-nine people out of a hundred would regard as representing two divergent schools of musical thinking? It is unanswerable in the present state of our knowledge.

Of the other four songs composed before 1863, the best is 'The leaves are rustling sadly' with its romantic character, its fine broad melody and simple undulating accompaniment, all in accordance with the tradition of the German *Lied* and genuinely expressive, but not particularly original.

To sum up: the differences between Mussorgsky in 1857, on the threshold of his musical career, and Mussorgsky at the end of 1862, after five years of study and casting about, are not very great. He had learnt but little of his craft, and all he had to show was a small number of minor compositions, none of them really significant. He judged himself shrewdly when he wrote to Balakiref that "his laziness had prevented his doing much" and that "he was still in quest of a path". Supposing that he had given up composition at that stage, no question of a loss to art would arise on the strength of those few songs and pieces, of his letters, or of any other information we have. Even the most searching study of his early output in the light of what the music of his maturity teaches us reveals no sign of the future that was in store for him.

Few germs of his mature style are discernible. Examination, indeed, reveals mostly features that are the very reverse of those which crop up later. Bold harmonies, changes of time-signature and of rhythm are not yet part of Mussorgsky's procedure. He often dwells on one harmony and uses many long values in the vocal parts.* His music—even including the one chorus from *Œdipus* that has reached us—is richer in lyrical than in dramatic qualities.

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* See *infra*, chapter XVII.

It is an interesting fact that after giving up the idea of *Œdipus* he never devoted a thought to dramatic music until the moment when Flaubert's *Salammbô* stirred his imagination and started him on his first serious attempt to write an opera. The years up to 1863 were years of incubation and not very purposeful casting about. It was between 1863 and 1868 that he matured; and there is plenty of evidence to show that it was under the very influences to which he alludes in the autobiographical sketches.

CHAPTER V

1863—1867

Mussorgsky matures—Joins a community—Enters the civil service—Starts composing Salammbô—*Attack of delirium tremens and cure—New friendships—Disquisition on art—Significant compositions—Estrangement from Balakiref*

IT is probably to the year 1863 rather than 1862 that Mussorgsky really referred when alluding to his "having set his brain in order and acquired useful knowledge" (see *supra*, p. 8): for in 1862 his main professional occupations had consisted in striving to compose a symphonic Allegro and Scherzo, and in transcribing for piano Beethoven's quartet Op. 130; and his reading, so far as we know, of Holbach's *Philosophie de la Nature* only—a shallow, diffuse, and declamatory profession of atheism and materialism, having no bearing upon the problems of any art.

On the other hand he certainly had matured to some extent, as shown by Borodin's account of their third meeting and also by the judgment he was to pass in June 1863 on Serof's opera *Judith* which betokens real thoughtfulness and strong views on dramatic music. But, as shall be seen, it is mostly from the autumn of 1863 onwards, when he lived in a 'community', that his general culture increased and his outlook widened and tended to become definite.

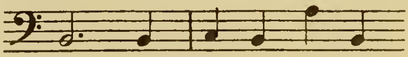
The first performance of *Judith* took place on 16 May 1863. On 10 June Mussorgsky wrote to Balakiref from Toropets, where he had gone to deal with the business of the family's estate, a long letter on the subject of this opera. Certain things in it he praised wholeheartedly, but most of it he censured without mercy:

> Wagner's *Kindchen* has achieved the feat of giving us a five-act opera which contains no single thought-compelling or really stirring page. The libretto is very bad, the declamation pitiful, non-Russian, the scoring interesting at times, although too intricate. And yet, this is the first earnest Russian opera produced since Dargomyjsky's *Russalka* and therefore is worth examining carefully. The overture is a kind of *Vorspiel*, dull, incoherent, which suggests intentions but not accom-

plishment: a sombre *largo* (the Hebrews) with sudden wild blasts in the trombones (probably Holofernes) and then the harp *agitato* (Judith). Serof is unable to conceive his portly heroine except surrounded by a halo of harp music—highly unsuitable considering her person and character.

In the first Act,.I noticed a serious fault. A phrase:

Ex. 6



which suggests the people lying exhausted on the stage, as seen when the curtain rises, vanishes when the elder begins his recitative. I should have carried on with it, added something to it, and built up the recitative over the working out: for the Hebrews, after all, remain there, silent and weary. But Serof forgets all about them until the time comes when he sees fit to give them a much praised, but quite paltry *fugato*. The end of the act is fine. The people have lost all hope, except in a miracle; and the music abruptly drops to a *pianissimo*, with, in the bass, fifths of a peculiar mystic quality—a solemn hush, not quite complete; a truly beautiful effect, the finest thing in the whole opera. But there is no action in this act, nor in the second; and nothing good in the third [Mussorgsky goes into particulars and gives, from memory, a number of musical quotations].

In the fourth (the Orgy) the orchestra storms and rages, but Holofernes's soldiers stand at attention, as though thinking: "Let the orchestra carry on: it's no business of ours!" Holofernes carouses alone . . . ugly, empty, lifeless stuff! But we do not have to go without a song, for the eunuch is ordered to sing one—a most complicated one, showing his wide knowledge of counterpoint, imitations, and the like. Holofernes resents the eunuch's musicianship, so interrupts him with a thoroughly non-contrapuntal, wild, and inane outburst. Then, his drunkenness increasing, the hallucination begins. Here again, Serof's indigence and weakness stand revealed to the full. And yet, what a field this scene afforded! How interesting it could have been to evoke the hallucination in the orchestra! Yet, Serof gives us nothing but French melodrama with Wagnerian howls in the violins. The scene of the murder, too, is also mere melodrama, but effective. The fifth act is poor.

Mussorgsky's conclusion is:

The whole score testifies to Serof's unimaginativeness, and teems with anachronisms. He has dealt with the Hebrews in terms of Christian and indeed Catholic music. It would have been advisable, apart from any question of anachronism, not to give us Hebrews indulging in mawkish harmonies that hail straight from Catholic organ music and are incompatible with the lofty spirituality of the Hebrew mind. As for Judith: why should harps and other sweet timbres be pressed into service whenever she appears? This is suitable when she is trying to seduce Holofernes. But in the main, she is a woman to reckon with —strong enough to behead Holofernes at one blow. She is an embodiment of energy, physical strength, and heroism.

All this foretokens Mussorgsky's mature outlook on dramatic music: by his sense of fitness, his interest in accurate characterization, in adaptation of the means to the end. His remarks on Serof's having forgotten all about the prostrate Hebrews, on the soldiers who stand motionless while the orchestra runs wild, are as characteristic as his objections to Serof's 'un-Russian' declamation and to the Judith music. His comments on the anachronisms are sound enough provided one interprets them rightly. The first concern of a modern opera composer dealing with an ancient subject should be to achieve fitness and consistency of style; as is said, with regard to writers, in H. W. and F. G. Fowler's *The King's English*, he should "Keep clear of such modes of expression as have only modern associations, such as would jar upon the reader's sense of fitness and destroy the time illusion. He will aim at a certain direct archaism and simplicity, but not resort to ostentatious, positive archaisms which only remind us that there is an illusion to be preserved."

Serof, it will be remembered, was the great and, indeed, practically the only champion of Wagner's music and theories in Russia. He had incensed the Russian nationalists by writing an article, 'Ruslan and the Ruslanists', in which he contrasted the narrowly Russian quality of Glinka's art with the universality of Wagner's. On the occasion of Wagner's concerts in Petersburg in 1863, he had published a set of three big articles on 'Wagner and his reform of opera'. The score of *Judith*, however, reveals no assimilation whatever of the essentials of this reform. It suggests, indeed, Meyerbeer's influence rather than Wagner's; and Mussorgsky's conclusion that "Wagner's *Kindchen* is not yet out of his swaddling-clothes" is, on the whole, quite justified.

He does not seem to have had the same wholesale aversion to Wagner's music as the other members of Balakiref's group. Wagner's concerts, the programmes of which included the *Tann-*

häuser Overture, the *Lohengrin* Prelude, three excerpts from the *Walküre* (Siegmund's love-song, the 'Ride', and the final scene) and Siegfried's smithy song, enabled him to form his own impressions up to a point. Cui, Stassof, and Balakiref had been loud in their abuse, Balakiref writing to Rimsky-Korsakof (who was then at Libau): "Wagner came and gave concerts which brought nothing new, nothing interesting whatever".

No mention of the concerts occurs in Borodin's correspondence; and we have no positive evidence that Mussorgsky attended them, but every reason to suppose that he did. His inclination to abhor, as his friends did, what he regarded as the German spirit in music (which asserted itself in later years) did not affect his love for Beethoven, Schubert and Schumann: so that he may well have felt the evocative power of Wagner's music, and appreciated the reaction it embodied against operatic conventions, even though —his own ideal being simplicity and terseness—he must have disliked Wagner's insistence and profuseness. The question how far Wagner was to influence him will be considered later. Let it be noted, meanwhile, that in 1867 he wrote to Rimsky-Korsakof: "We are forever abusing Wagner, and yet Wagner is strong, and strong because he enquires into the art of music, and deals hard measure to it, which he would not do if he were more 'talented'" —a sentence which the context (see *infra*, p. 60) clearly shows to imply praise and not censure. But, as regards Serof, if there is any truth in Kompaneisky's notion that *Judith* may have contributed to give Mussorgsky the idea of composing *Salammbô* we may say that it also showed him, very definitely, how not to do it.

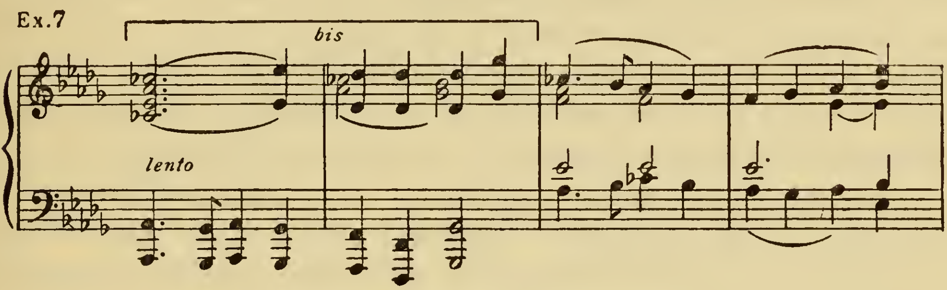
In the final portion of his letter to Balakiref, Mussorgsky reverts to his personal affairs:

> And I, the sinner, keep worrying about our property, and am coming to the conclusion that I shall be unable to live on the income; so that I must enter the civil service if I wish to pamper my humble body—a bad, very bad business!
>
> I have little else to tell you, no impressions of this place which I know inside out with its smug, sanctimonious landowners. One thing I must say: the peasants are far fitter for self-administration than the landlords. At meetings they come straight to the point and show that they understand their own interests. Whereas the landowners are forever wrangling and giving themselves airs. It is all utterly monotonous. Good-bye: in my next letter I may have something more interesting to tell you about my life here and myself generally.

A letter he wrote on 22 June to Cui shows the statement that "he had no impressions" to have been inaccurate:

> I feel wretched and bored and furious. The administrator [his brother, Philaret] has made a terrible mess of things. I hoped to do useful work of my own, and find myself compelled to devote my time to inquiries and investigations and dealings with police and non-police officials. But for my mother, I should go quite mad: but she is overjoyed to have me here, so I am glad to give her that pleasure. But what a set of landowners! Of planters! They all go every day to the club in town—and raise a mighty hubbub, beginning with much chatter and invariably ending in a free fight. And they spend their time bewailing their lost rights and ruination. They sob and howl and raise scandal. There are a few decent young men about, but I hardly ever encounter them, because they are kept busy negotiating with the peasants. And thus I live in this noisome atmosphere, which can stimulate no fine thoughts, all one's energy being devoted to avoid the stench and escape suffocation. A few days ago I came across some verse by Goethe—a short piece which delighted me. I started setting it to music. One bit came out well:

Ex.7



> I have composed nothing else. Thanks to the administrator, my poor head is entirely in the hands of the police. But at least I am able to tackle trifles. The text (from *Wilhelm Meister*, I think) refers to a pauper. Paupers, for sure, will be able to sing my music without qualms of conscience. I am preparing my Intermezzo for the winter. The scoring will be interesting.

The song to which he refers remained unknown until 1909, when the manuscript book *Years of Youth* was discovered. Until then, the sentence "paupers will be able to sing my music without qualms of conscience" was regarded by biographers as betokening his early concern with depicting the life of the humble and unhappy—a thoroughly unfounded notion. What led him to imagine that Goethe's harper was a 'pauper' is not clear: the tone of the poem is neither plaintive nor imploring, and not plebeian in the least. Anyhow, the music has none of the pathetic suggestiveness of 'Yeremushka's Lullaby' or 'The Orphan'. It is, like the poem, dignified in tone—one might say, suggestive of breeding. Clearly, his remark to Cui represents no profession of realism: it is merely a humorous allusion to the danger in which he stood of being a pauper after the settlement of his father's estate.

In one particular it may be regarded as a landmark: it is the first musical composition in history to end on a discord—a major seventh. This is a process that Mussorgsky used many a time in later days. Like most of his innovations, it has become current coinage.

Returning to Petersburg in the autumn of 1863, Mussorgsky started life as one of a small community of young men. These were, Stassof tells us, the three brothers Loghinof (Viatcheslaf, Leonid and Peter), Nikolaï Lobkovsky, and Nikolaï Levatchef: all five well-bred youths, who had hitherto lived with their families, but wished to attempt a practical application of the theory of living in common set forth in Tchernyshevsky's famous novel *The Vital Question* and, besides working in government offices, they were engaged in artistic or scientific pursuits (none of them ever achieved, it would seem, anything noteworthy). Each of the six had a room of his own, strictly private; and there was a common-room in which they assembled to discuss art, philosophy, literature and probably many other subjects. It was then, obviously, that Mussorgsky really began to "acquire much useful knowledge", and became acquainted with most of the works of the authors he names in his autobiography (see *supra*, p. 3).

A Russian translation of Flaubert's novel *Salammbô* had just appeared. The enthusiasm of the six youths was aroused, and soon Mussorgsky decided to compose an opera on the subject. By October, he had written one scene of the libretto (the first of the fourth act): and by 15 December, the words and the music of the second scene of the second act (Salammbô at the Shrine of Tanit). Whether he had made a definite plan before plunging *in medias res* is not known.

That same month, he was admitted to the civil service with the *tchin** of collegiate secretary. He took up his duties in January 1864, as assistant clerk of the Central Engineering Board.

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* *Tchin*: rank, equivalent to military rank, bestowed upon Russian civil servants according to the post held, seniority and so on. That of collegiate secretary corresponded to that of staff captain.

The year 1864 was uneventful. Mussorgsky divided his time between his clerical duties and work on *Salammbô*. He turned out three songs, two of which, 'Night' and 'Kallistrat', are landmarks in the history of his evolution and, later, contributed to make his name famous—especially outside Russia. 'Night'—a beautiful example of highly imaginative lyricism—teems with lovely rich harmonies, worthy of comparison with the subtlest and most original in the late song-set *Sunless*.* 'Kallistrat', which he described as his "first essay in the comic", is also the first of the racy, unparalleled character songs in which he evokes the peasantry of his country—a wonderfully telling picture of a cheerful tatterdemalion. Many features of his mature idiom and style (see chapter XVII) are observable in it: notably melodic turns derived from Russian folk-music, the use of a modal scale with variable notes (as in 'The Little Star' of 1857) and free resort to changes of time signature. In the third, 'Wild winds blowing', similar features are noticeable. But the song, as a whole, does not rise to the same high level. It starts impressively and with great driving power (again the main theme resembles that of the 'Ever rising' chorus in *Boris*), but there is less unity of touch and purpose in the middle section. In the course of the year, he also completed two scenes for *Salammbô*: the first of the fourth act (in the underground chamber beneath the city) and the first of the third (the temple of Moloch).

We have very little information bearing on the year 1865. His mother died in the early spring. He felt the loss deeply, but there is no record of how he reacted to the blow. In April, he composed two little piano pieces which he inscribed to her memory. They are entitled 'From the recollections of my childhood: (No. 1) Nanny and I, (No. 2) The first punishment (Nanny locks me up in a dark room)'. Two months earlier, he had inscribed to her a song 'Prayer'; and in September he inscribed to her memory his beautiful 'Peasant's Lullaby' his first evocation of the tragic aspects of the life of the Russian peasantry, and a landmark in his progress. This was his only important achievement for the year. The only other compositions of 1865 were two piano pieces 'Duma' and 'La Capricieuse', and a song 'The Outcast Woman', which bears the sub-title 'a study in recitative' and is an extremely poor piece of work, so conventional, so stilted, and so thoroughly unlike any other music from his pen that one can but wonder how he came to indite it.

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* Both 'Night' and 'Kallistrat' exist in two versions, and there are many differences between the two forms of 'Night'.

There is no indication of his having taken any interest in Serof's opera *Rogneda*, which was produced in November and scored a great success. Two years later, he wrote to Rimsky-Korsakof: "There's a fine and cultured musician for you! What a mess he has made of the old Russian epic! His sense of history and of musical fitness is inferior to Verstovsky's. He uses in the scene of the banquet a modern tavern song and introduces dancing girls, as if Vladimir was a kind of Holofernes."

In the autumn came the "serious illness" (delirium tremens) mentioned in Philaret's recollections. It occurred shortly after he had spent a three-weeks' leave "for urgent private affairs" at Karevo, and we have no particulars of it. There is, in all likelihood, a good deal of truth in Z. Savelova's remarks[3] that "The atmosphere of the 'community' can hardly have been conducive to good health. Its members, while aiming at the 'new life' had not thrown their old habits overboard. They must have lived unhygienically, and on an inadequate, unsuitable diet, eked out (as customary at the time at Russian student reunions) with much drink."

Whether the visit to Karevo, stirring his memories of his beloved mother, and also the fresh worries attendant upon the final disposal of what remained of the estate had upset him to the extent of inducing an outbreak of the craving for alcohol that lay latent in him cannot be said for certain. Anyhow, Philaret's statement is the first indication we have of excess on Mussorgsky's part. There is no reason to believe that it would have been made otherwise than on the strength of some doctor's pronouncement: and the diagnosis is not one in which an error can justifiably be surmised: the pathology of this disease was perfectly well known at the time. Stassof, in his biography of 1881, piously substituted the words 'nervous disease' and the actual text of Philaret's letter to him remained unknown until it was published in 1932.[4]

He was persuaded to take up his abode with his brother and sister-in-law. He made a quick recovery, which marked the dawn of a long period of steady work and speedy progress. In the course of the year 1866, he had the good fortune to make new friends who exercised forthwith a cheering and stimulating influence on him: Liudmila Shestakova (1816-1906), Glinka's sister, and Vladimir Nikolsky (1836-83). And a close friendship developed between him and Rimsky-Korsakof, who had just returned from a world cruise in his capacity as a naval officer, and had resumed his place in the circle.

In 1866 Liudmila Shestakova, emerging from a three years' retirement following upon the shock caused by the death of her young daughter, started keeping open house. She was a charming woman, beloved of all who knew her, warm-hearted, enthusiastic, energetic, understanding and tactful, devoted to the propagation of Glinka's music and keenly interested in the new Russian music. Her home became a meeting-place for musicians and scholars; Balakiref, the brothers Stassof, Cui, Borodin and Rimsky-Korsakof were constant visitors. Mussorgsky's heart went out to her at once, and their friendship lasted until his death. She was one of the few human beings who showed patient sympathy with him in his hours of adversity.

Her recollections[9] are a valuable contribution to the portrayal of Mussorgsky in 1866 and after:

> When I first met him he was twenty-seven years old. I was struck by the particular delicacy and sweetness of his manners—those of a remarkably well-bred and self-possessed man. During the fifteen years our friendship lasted, never did I know him lose his temper or in any way forget himself, even to the extent of using one unpleasant word to anybody. Whenever I marvelled at his self-control, he would reply: "That I owe to my mother: she was a saint". Towards Balakiref his behaviour was invariably one of deep respect, testifying to his admiration for his teacher's great talent and wonderful memory. He seemed to think more highly of Vladimir Stassof than of any of the others, always turning to him for advice on musical, literary, and other similar matters. And Stassof, willing to give ungrudging help to everybody, was particularly eager to comply, for he loved Mussorgsky both as man and artist.
>
> Many people used to advise Mussorgsky to get married, but he had a perfectly ludicrous aversion to the notion. Many a time he assured me, in an earnest voice, that if ever I happened to read in the newspaper that he had shot or hanged himself, I might be sure that it had been on the eve of his wedding-day.
>
> During the years 1866-9, feverish activity reigned throughout the group. The days were not long enough for them all to play their new works to one another, and talk music. So, after leaving my house, loth to part company, they would spend much time escorting one another home. Those meetings at my house were a great joy to me.
>
> After 1872, Mussorgsky and Borodin became great friends. The former was composing *Khovanshchina* and the latter *Prince Igor*. They

> often called upon me together. At times Vladimir Stassof joined them.

It was at her house that Mussorgsky first met Nikolsky, a historian and literary scholar, and an authority on Pushkin. This friendship, too, ripened quickly. According to Andreï Rimsky-Korsakof[4] the two had much in common—especially a great love for the history, legends and traditions of Russia, for Russian philology, etc., a keen sense of humour, and an appetite for fun. It was Nikolsky who, in 1868, gave Mussorgsky the idea of Pushkin's *Boris Godunof* as an opera subject. The correspondence between them lasted from 1867 to 1872. Later, strange to say, they seem to have kept in touch almost exclusively through the intermediary of Liudmila Shestakova, although continuing as good friends as ever.

Rimsky-Korsakof, in his Memoirs, gives the following particulars as to the growth of his friendship with Mussorgsky.

> In 1866-7 we began to see much of one another. I used to visit him at the flat which he shared with his brother and sister-in-law. There, being safe from the interference of Balakiref and Cui* we used to talk freely.
>
> He played his compositions to me. There was much in them that aroused my enthusiasm. We talked excitedly about his plans, which were far more numerous than my own. One was for a tone-poem on the subject of *Sadko*. But he had given it up, and he suggested that I should use it. Balakiref approved, and so I set to work.†

It was very fortunate for him, who was of a sociable disposition, and loved to exchange views with other people and to explain himself to them, that he should have made these new friends. Otherwise, he might have felt himself quite isolated, as had happened before and was to happen in later years. Balakiref was beginning to lose patience with him both as man and artist. In a letter to Cui of 27 January 1867, he not only dubbed him "the addle-pated perpetrator of Libyan and Mixolydian dramas" but also derided the "churlish humour of certain letters of his". He remained fond of him after a fashion and anxious for his welfare: but Mussorgsky could no longer feel that he was the trusted friend, companion and guide of earlier days.

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* Rimsky-Korsakof records that Balakiref and Cui regarded themselves as the mature and great ones. "Borodin, Mussorgsky and I were the immature and juniors. Our attitude to them was one of subordination. They dictated and we obeyed."

† The notion had been suggested to Balakiref by Vladimir Stassof in 1861, and passed on by him to Mussorgsky.

The first song he composed after his recovery (January 1866) 'Why do thine eyes reproach me?' is insignificant. In February, he reverted to *Salammbô*, composing a chorus for the fourth act (the priestesses helping Salammbô to don her nuptial robe) and, in April, a chorus of Libyan warriors (used later for *Joshua*). These were the last portions of *Salammbô* he wrote.

His reasons for giving up the scheme are obvious enough. He had been attracted by the possibility of composing great choral scenes and showing masses in action, but had not succeeded in building up a satisfactory libretto. Moreover, the musical treatment of such scenes on a big scale was beyond his powers. He had had a vision of a new type of opera, that would be a drama of the people, in which the chorus would play an active part, standing on equal rights with the individual characters, not "standing by purposelessly until given something to sing", as he had put it in his survey of Serof's *Judith*; but, in actual fact, *Salammbô* was turning out to be, in many respects, very similar to the Meyerbeerian type of opera.

He also felt that he was not destined by nature to compose music in the Eastern style. Later he explained to Kompaneisky: "To carry on would have been futile: Carthage would have fallen into the hands of the foe. Besides, we have had enough of the East with *Judith*. Art is no game, and time is precious."

As Findeisen rightly remarks, much of the music he had composed for *Salammbô* suggested the Moscow Kremlin rather than the Carthage acropolis. And indeed, part of it fell into place quite naturally in *Boris Godunof*.

In the course of the year, he composed four songs which rank among his best, 'Savishna', 'Hopak', 'The Dnieper' and 'The Seminarist', and he turned his attention to instrumental music more purposefully than he had done before. The circumstances in which he composed 'Savishna' are noteworthy. He actually heard a village simpleton imploring a girl to listen to his love plea; and he aimed at reproducing as accurately as possible in reason his pathetic, inarticulate words.

The first mention of actual work on the tone-poem *A Night on the Bare Mountain* occurs in a letter to Balakiref of 20 April 1866: "Let me know when I may come to see you. I wish to discuss all manner of things, and to show you my new bit for *Salammbo*: the war-song of the Libyans, a chorus for male voices with a variant *à la Georgienne.* I have started sketching 'The Witches'. Satan's train does not satisfy me yet."

In all likelihood the composing of this tone-poem was the long-delayed aftermath of plans formed years before (see *supra*, pp. 38–9). The work, according to Rimsky-Korsakof's Memoirs, was first devised for piano and orchestra, under the influence of Liszt's *Totentanz*, the first performance of which in Russia took place at Petersburg at a concert of the Russian Music Society on 3 March 1866, with Herke, Mussorgsky's quondam teacher, as the soloist.* But no trace remains of that version, nor is any other first-hand mention of it to be found.

In a letter of 14 August Mussorgsky again expressed a wish to show to Balakiref the full score of the *Salammbô* chorus and to discuss 'The Witches' with him. But circumstances prevented his so doing for quite a while.

The year 1867 began auspiciously. On 29 January Mussorgsky finished the score of 'The Destruction of Sennacherib', a choral setting of a Russian translation of Byron's poem. It was performed on 6 March at a Free School of Music concert. Kompaneisky, who met Mussorgsky at that concert for the first time, records that neither the composer nor the work impressed him. His description of the meeting runs:

> Captain M. offered to introduce me, and pointed him out to me. I saw a medium-sized, very dandified youth, whose appearance did not attract me. He had a snub nose, bulging eyes, red cheeks, his hair was slightly curly, and he seemed rather excitable. I wanted to avoid the introduction, but it was too late: my companion was already speaking to him. So there I had him in front of me, elegantly dressed, wearing lilac gloves, perfectly groomed, aristocratic, tight-lipped, talking through his teeth, and adorning almost every sentence with French words. He struck me as the finished image of a young fop. Yet he was obviously well-bred, and I felt in him something out of the common, something engaging. The expression of his face would change suddenly from sternness to a frank, pleasant smile. I also noticed sudden changes in the intonation and rhythm of his speech, his deep, well-modulated voice, his impetuous movements, and his challenging attitude—tempered, however, by a certain shyness and restraint. Everything in him revealed a high-strung temperament and a very short temper. Five years later I began to meet him often at Petrof's house. There I learnt to love his music; and forthwith I started propagating it, chiefly by singing it in public.

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* The influence of the *Totentanz* is discernible in many Russian works of the period, including even Balakiref's *Islamey*.

There is a certain sameness in the wording of the pen-portraits of Mussorgsky that were written from memory: one might suspect that the authors were influenced by Borodin's description of him in 1859, printed in Stassof's big article of 1881, which most people who knew Mussorgsky are likely to have read.

Early in the year, Balakiref had gone to Prague, where Liudmila Shestakova had arranged for him to conduct performances of Glinka's *Ruslan and Liudmila* (given for the first time in Prague) and *A Life for the Tsar*. He had had to contend against fierce opposition on the part of Smetana, who was the chief conductor at the National Theatre, and of the whole pro-Polish anti-Russian party in the city. This had created a good deal of feeling in Petersburg, and especially in Balakiref's own circle. Mussorgsky gave vent to his excitement in a letter to Balakiref (23 January), a mixture of honest anger and childish peevishness in which he inveighed with coarse, laboured humour against Anton Rubinstein and the Petersburg Conservatoire (the rivalry between this and Balakiref's Free School was raging fiercer than ever), Smetana, the Czechs, the Poles, and Roman Catholicism all pell-mell.

An even more ebullient letter followed three days later in which Mussorgsky, after gloating over the failure of Dargomyjsky's opera-ballet *The Triumph of Bacchus* at Moscow, reverted to the same topics, considerably extending the range of his denunciations.

Portions of this letter are, in certain respects, worth considering.

> Must our music really be hemmed in by geographical boundaries? Is it a fact that our folk-music cannot take root in a country whose people are of our race? Mark well that throughout Europe music lies at the mercy of fashion and slavery. In England singers from abroad are engaged, and works are performed—sometimes out of sheer desperation. There fashion rules the roost. In France it is all *can-can* and 'débarrassez-nous de M. Berlioz'. The Spaniards and Italians may be brushed aside, likewise the Turks and the Greeks. Germany affords a perfect instance of slavery: the deification of Conservatoires and routine—beer and stinking cigars, music and beer, stinking cigars and music alfresco. A German could write a whole treatise on the fact that Beethoven wrote a certain crotchet stem downwards and not upwards according to rule. He could never realize that Beethoven, working at white heat, would make little slips, and did not bother about nonsensical details. This kind of stupidity, loathsome enough in the genuine, pure German, becomes even more nauseating in the Czechs, mere slaves of slaves, who have no ambition of remaining true to their own selves.
>
> If I have woven this garland, dear Mily, it is because I feel deeply

for you who have to deal with such cattle. Anger drives me to rise in arms against all those Germans and Italians and Jews, who impose upon us easy-going Russians. My point is: ask me to sing (in earnest, not as a joke) Mendelssohn's *Lieder* and from a gentle, polished human being I turn into a blackguard. Ask a Russian mujik to enjoy the *Volkslieder* of Germany in decay, and he will be unable to do it, while the Czech will revel in the stuff, while loudly proclaiming that he is a Slav. A people, a community who remain insensitive to tunes which, by reminding them of their ancestry, should set their heartstrings vibrating, are dead.

The Jews, when they hear their traditional music, leap with joy. Their eyes shine. I have seen it happen many a time. They are far above the Czechs, those Jews of ours, who live in filth, in stinking hovels.

Those views of his on nationality in music and on the evil influence of 'German routine' were becoming an important factor in the development of his artistic personality. They can be more profitably studied from the letters in which he sets them forth more soberly, and less loosely. Let it be noted that in 1867, while his feelings against 'German routine' had reached boiling-point, he was busily engaged in studying Beethoven's quartets and preparing piano transcriptions of movements from Op. 59, 131 and 135 for use at the meetings of the circle. Apart from any question of chauvinism, he must have felt that the ways of pedantry and routine were always the same, whether the new Russian music or Beethoven's was under consideration. This feeling led him to compose, in December 1867, a little song, 'The Classicist' (the manuscript bears the explanatory note "by way of reply to Famyntsin's* remarks on the heresy of the Russian school of music") which is a perfect example of a musical cartoon—a genre of which he is the inventor. 'The Classicist' is more interesting as a cartoon than from the musical point of view. The text, Mussorgsky's own work, says: "I am lucid, polished, chaste, passionate with restraint—a perfect classic, bashful and urbane. I detest and fight modern innovations, feeling that their noise and disorder will be the death of art: whereas I am lucid, polished etc.," The music illustrates the words most aptly: it resembles a school exercise in conventional airs and graces; in the middle section, a motif from Rimsky-Korsakof's *Sadko* is used when the classicist expresses his hatred of modern innovations.

At the end of April, Mussorgsky lost his government post, owing to a reorganization of the department. This unexpected happening does not seem to have worried him much. His head was full of musical plans; his letters show that he felt cheerful and buoyant. And, as it happens, not once during that year did his mind turn to tragical or gloomy subjects. Indeed the songs of 1867 are among the brightest in his whole output: the sparkling fantasy 'The Magpie'; the delightfully idyllic 'Garden by the Don'; 'The Banquet'; 'The Urchin', a racy picture of a young scamp baiting an old woman until she catches hold of him and cuffs him soundly; 'The He-Goat', a good-humoured satirical sketch of a girl who gladly marries a repulsive old man for his money; and, in another vein, the lovely 'Hebrew Song', a setting of a few lines from the Song of Songs. Even 'Gathering Mushrooms', that impressive evocation of a peasant woman who dreams of her lover, and hates her old husband (for whom she would like to set apart a few poisonous fungi) has more of wry humour than of malevolence.

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* An influential Russian critic.

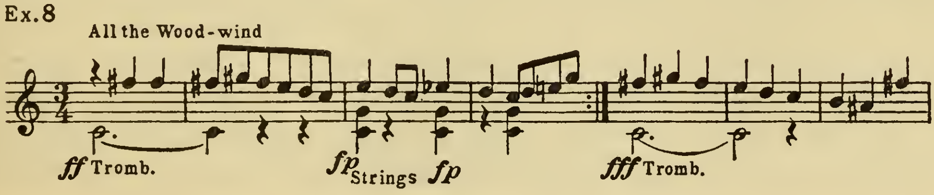
Despite its gruesome subject the music of *A Night on the Bare Mountain* is not frightening but exhilarating; it emphasizes the picturesque aspects of the Witches' Sabbath and not the obscene atmosphere to which Mussorgsky referred with such gusto (a unique instance of a topic of that sort in his correspondence) when describing his new work to Nikolsky.

He set about the score on 10 June and finished it within twelve days. How very pleased he was with it is shown by the following two letters.

To Rimsky-Korsakof, 5 July:

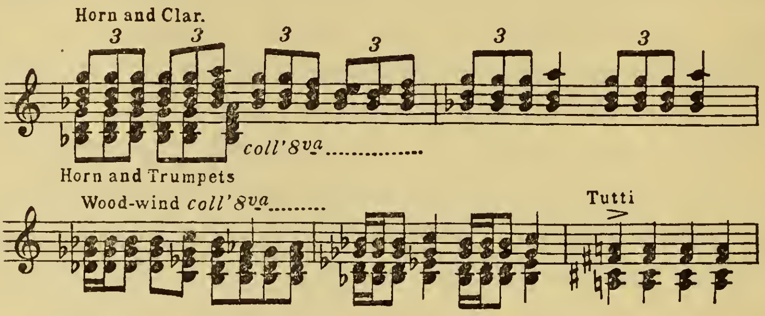
> On the eve of St. John's Night, 23 June, I finished with God's help, *St. John's Night on the Bare Mountain*, a tone-picture whose content is: (1) assembly of the witches, hubbub and chatter, (2) Satan's pageant, (3) glorification of Satan, (4) the Witches' Sabbath. I wrote the score straight away without any preliminary rough draft. I began on 10 June or thereabouts, and on the 23 came the time to rejoice. Your favourite bits came out quite well in the scoring. I have added a good deal to what I had composed in the glorification: for instance, there is a passage which will make Cui say that I ought to attend a musical class at the Conservatoire:

Ex.8



in B minor—the witches glorifying Satan, as you see, nakedly, in all primitive barbarity. In the witch-dance comes the following rather original call, the strings and piccolo trilling on B flat:

Ex. 9



As I said, over a trill on B flat! G minor, over B flat major, alternates in amusing wise with G flat major over B flat minor, with interruptions by the chords in F sharp minor breaking in—a thing which would lead to my expulsion from the class to which Cui would have me consigned for the greater glory of my witches.

As regards plan and form, the work is fairly novel. Introduction in two sections (the witches assemble), motif in D minor with a bit of working-out (their chatter) connected with Satan's train in B flat major (I have been careful to avoid the 'Hungarian March' effect); motif of the procession without working-out, but followed by a response in E flat minor (the ribald character, in that key, is most amusing), ending with D major. Then comes, in B minor, the glorification, in Russian style, with variations and a semi-ecclesiastic *quasi-trio*; a transition introduces the witch-dance, whose first motif is in D minor, and which also consists of variations in Russian style. At the end of the dance comes the whole-tone scale, and figures from the introduction reappear—which should be rather effective.

You do not know the Witches' Sabbath yet: it is compact and glowing. I think the form—variations and calls interspersed—was the most suitable in which to cast that evocation of pother. The general character of the thing is warmth: nothing drags, all is firmly connected without German transitions—which of course would have introduced an element of coldness. Please God, you will hear and judge.

In my opinion, *St. John's Night* is something new, which ought to impress thoughtful musicians favourably. I regret the distance between us two, for I should like us to examine the new-born score together. Let it clearly be understood, however, that I shall never start remodelling it; with whatever shortcomings it is born, with them it must live if it is to live at all. Yet it would be useful if we could discuss it together. A good deal might be made clear. And when the work is performed, there will appear in the *Viedomosti* [the daily of which César Cui was the musical critic] a tactful, fatherly dressing-down of Modinka by César. There is a book *Witchcraft* by Khotinsky, in which the Witches' Sabbath is most graphically described according to the evidence of a woman who was tried for sorcery, and who confessed to having had amorous relations with Satan himself. The unfortunate lunatic was burnt at the stake. This happened in the sixteenth century. The plan of the Sabbath was devised according to her description.

To Nikolsky, on 12 July:

I have settled the matter of my 'Witches'. You will hear all about them from our hospitable Liudmila Ivanovna [Shestakova]. But now I am going to tackle the matter from another angle for your benefit, and you are free to approve or disapprove.

'The Witches' is a vulgar appellation, a mere nickname. The real title of my work is *St. John's Night on the Bare Mountain.* If I remember aright, witches used to assemble on that mountain, there to jabber and disport themselves pending Satan's arrival. When he appeared, they formed a circle around his throne and glorified him. When he felt sufficiently stimulated by their praise, he gave the signal for the Sabbath to begin, selecting for himself those witches who had taken his fancy. Well, that's how I've done the thing! (1) The assembling, the jabber and pranks; (2) Satan's train; (3) the obscene glorification; and (4) the Sabbath. If the work is performed I wish this programme to appear on the bills for the enlightenment of the audience. My music is Russian and independent in form and character, fiery and disorderly in tone. In fact, the Sabbath begins with the entry of the minor devils: in the old narratives the glorification was part of the Sabbath. I have labelled the episode separately in order to define the musical form (which is new) more clearly. Please tell me whether I have understood the subject well. You know something of my musical talents, and will realize the importance I ascribe to accuracy in the depiction of a traditional legend, whatever its particulars, so far as such a thing is possible in music. I have no use for music which does not depict truthfully, unless it bears no specific title and is just named, according to German practice, this or that in B flat minor or A minor.

I composed *St. John's Night* at great speed: right away in full score, clear draft, in about twelve days. Thank God it took me only four days to write down my other piece 'Intermezzo' also in clear draft. Most of it had been composed for piano solo in 1863 [*sic*: for 1861]. While at work on *The Night* I did without sleep and actually finished it on St. John's Eve. It simply seethed within me. I did not even know what was happening within me—or rather—I knew, but it was no use knowing, it would only have made for bewilderment. In the Sabbath, I divided the orchestra into separate groups; listeners will easily apprehend the respective timbres of wind and strings standing in sufficiently sharp contrast. I think that is the actual character of a Sabbath: a scattered, but continuous cross-fire of calls, until the whole rabble unite in the final embrace. At least, that is how I conceive the thing. I am talking a lot about my *Night*, but probably for the reason that I see in this wicked prank of mine a really Russian and original achievement, quite free from German profundity and routine, born, like Savishna, on Russian soil and nurtured on Russian corn.

These lines repay study in more ways than one. Apart from showing his increasing concern with being really and wholly Russian, original, independent of 'German routine', and his dislike of German methods and the German spirit, they reveal his eagerness to achieve an almost Utopian degree of accuracy in evocation and depiction. He seems to believe that evocation can be not only graphic, but ethnographically specific, and that it can descend to minute details. He stands firm in his belief that music should be a means and not an end. There can be no question but that he was further than ever from developing a sense of abstract musical form, and able to think in terms of illustrative music only.

Another interesting point is the new note of confidence in himself. He is no longer tormented by doubts, nor disposed to follow advice. A year or so later, when engaged in composing *The Marriage* and in exploring the possibilities of characterization in stage music, once again doubts assailed him: he felt that he had a lesson to learn. But in matters of instrumental music, his labours of 1867 represent a *ne plus ultra*. They gave him a limited, but useful, knowledge of orchestration. *A Night on the Bare Mountain* in the original (though probably not the first draft) revealed in 1933, when Nikolai Malko gave performances of it in many countries, proved to be not only satisfying but brilliant from the orchestral point of view.

Mussorgsky also remodelled that year 1867, his piano Intermezzo of 1861, expanding and orchestrating it. Years later, he revealed to Stassof that this piece, despite its purely classical character, was 'secretly' Russian and had been inspired by a scene of the life of the people.

It was, he told me, in 1861. On a sunny winter day he had seen a whole crowd of peasants crossing the fields, stumbling in the snow, often sinking quite deep and having to struggle to extricate themselves. It was a beautiful, picturesque scene, both impressive and amusing. Then, suddenly, a group of girls appeared, laughing and singing as they advanced along a smooth track. "The picture immediately transformed itself into music within my head, and unexpectedly the first theme of my Intermezzo rising and falling *à la Bach* took shape. And the girls' mirth took the shape of a melody which I used later for the middle section—the trio. But all this *in modo classico*, in keeping with my tendencies at the time."

To Rimsky-Korsakof he gave the following particulars in a letter of 15 July, which also contains all that is known of a stillborn plan of his to compose another tone-poem—this time on a historical Czech subject:

> The Intermezzo is finished in full score (B minor). It was originally a piano piece without a middle section. Now it has one, in E major, in the character of the trio and scherzo of Beethoven's ninth Symphony: that is, with strings, pizzicato, and light jovial scoring. This section, I grant, stands in rather sharp contrast with the B minor main part and repeat, but it will create a refreshing impression before the return to B minor. In the B minor part the rhythmic pulsations are entrusted to the strings, pizzicato, and wind, thus: violins with woodwinds, then 'celli and basses with trombones *pianissimo*. I believe this will be fairly effective. The piece is a mere sop to the Germans; and I have inscribed it to Borodin. Anyhow, I am glad I composed it. Now I am planning a poem *Podĕbrad*, the Czech. . . . I have already a few 'standpoints' [*sic*] for it. The introduction begins with two progressions, the second in C sharp minor. Then comes a kind of continuation of the above little theme, in the style of a Slav cantilena ending with all the strings vibrating in an orchestral tutti. The crescendo gradually reaches a *fortissimo* (explosion) after which comes a gradual return to calm. The Introduction represents the sad situation of Bohemia under the German yoke. There is a Podĕbrad's theme and a theme expressing the Pope's anger with Podĕbrad. At the end, after runs in various strings on the scale of A major, and a little Slavonic fanfare in the brass, the Podĕbrad theme (I am arranging it *à la guerra*): Podĕbrad—the King—Slavism victorious. The poem begins in F sharp minor but ends in D major.*

The idea of composing this tone-poem was obviously suggested to Mussorgsky by the fact that in May 1867 a special concert had been given at Petersburg in honour of visitors from various Slav countries; Balakiref had composed an Overture on Czech themes for the occasion, and Rimsky-Korsakof a Serbian Fantasy. But Mussorgsky's interest in instrumental composition was short-lived. One of the reasons he did not go on with *Poděbrad* and never composed another orchestral work, was that Balakiref disapproved of the *Night on the Bare Mountain* and flatly refused to arrange for a performance of it. It was, in fact, never performed during Mussorgsky's lifetime, although he remodelled it, and also tried to use it in the act allotted to him of the collective opera *Mlada* (see chapter VIII) and in *The Sorotchintsi Fair*. The main reason, however, is that shortly afterwards he found subjects for dramatic works which really fired his imagination: first *The Marriage*, then, before he had started on the second act of this, *Boris Godunof*. The only instrumental works he composed after 1867 were the *Pictures from an Exhibition* for piano, a tribute to the memory of a friend, and a few unimportant piano pieces.

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* George of Podĕbrad was a King of Bohemia who, in the fifteenth century, successfully defended his country against the encroachments of the Germans and the Papacy. As regards the "beginning in F sharp minor and ending in D major", see *infra*, chapter XVIII.

He gained during 1867 no small measure of experience in the art of writing for the orchestra. His correspondence with Rimsky-Korsakof shows that he approached the problems of instrumental music in a thoughtful and critical spirit, and did not take questions of harmony, key-relation, scoring and so on lightly.

Rimsky-Korsakof had given him particulars, with musical examples, of *Sadko*. His discussion of them is most instructive:

> You were right in deciding to begin by evoking, not a storm, but the undulating sea: this will be far more awesome and imposing; and I like your way of doing it. The plain D flat for the water-music is a good choice. The scale depicting Sadko dragged to the bottom of the sea is most original harmonically, and adequately fierce and fantastic. The quiet, luminous turn to D major is very successful. When the winds interrupt for the first time the D major melody the effect is delightful: but the next example you quote smacks too much of Serof's *Rogneda*. I won't have that! Change it, please, for Heaven's sake!
>
> The step from A to G sharp in the bass is bold and you know I'm all for boldness. But here harmonic confusion will ensue. It might sound wrong in the orchestra—but I may be wrong. The accompaniment to the underseas theme is poetic and alluring. And how very right you are not to give the muted strings high notes! The medium and low notes are so enchanting, so fit to suggest the underseas kingdom! Masterly! I do not approve of your religious theme. It is not bad, but it lacks the semi-ascetic and at the same time luminous

quality I consider desirable. Arising suddenly in the midst of the tempest, it ought to create an instantaneous and thorough change of mood. You find another one!

All that you tell me shows that I did wisely in urging you to compose *Sadko*—your first Russian work. I rejoice, and the successful completion of *Sadko* will mean a lot to you.

Rimsky-Korsakof's replies are in the same strain. He approved of the *Night on the Bare Mountain* as described by Mussorgsky. "Harmonic and melodic blemishes are admissible in a hymn to Satan, and nobody would dream of consigning you to a Conservatoire for what you have done. The Conservatoire people will shudder, no doubt, while incapable of turning out anything decent."

He went on to say that he had spontaneously altered the Serof-like theme, and decided to do away with the intervention of St. Nicholas. He defended the passage which Mussorgsky had declared shocking, explaining that the contrasting orchestral timbres would save the situation. And he expressed his eagerness to read the score of *A Night on the Bare Mountain.*

These letters give a faithful picture of the relations between the two young composers as they remained until 1874 or so—a period during which they kept in close contact and continued to exchange views and criticism as well as confidences. Liudmila Shestakova's Recollections[9] state that they often met at her house to discuss things. " At times amusing scenes occurred. Rimsky-Korsakof would sit at the piano and play his latest achievement, after which Mussorgsky offered his comments, Rimsky-Korsakof jumping up and pacing the room. But Mussorgsky remained quietly seated, or played bits on the piano, until Rimsky-Korsakof regained his composure, came close to him and listened attentively to his talk, and often ended by agreeing."

In later years Rimsky-Korsakof's musical outlook changed considerably. He ceased to believe that 'blemishes' of a kind fit to set Conservatoire professors a-shuddering could ever be acceptable. He blushed for his own sins against scholastic conventions, and revised all his early works drastically. His path diverged more and more from Mussorgsky's, and they ceased to understand one another's artistic aims. In his Memoirs Rimsky-Korsakof says: " In January 1874 *Boris Godunof* was produced. We all rejoiced and triumphed"; but in reality he, like everyone else except maybe Stassof, was torn between admiration for Mussorgsky's genius and horror for his trespasses against the conventional musical grammar of the time.

In 1867, however, Rimsky-Korsakof, not yet nearing this second stage of his evolution, was eager to accept Mussorgsky as he found him. The two, for the time being, were working on parallel lines: *Sadko* and the *Night on the Bare Mountain* were, in fact, the first two actual tone-poems composed by Russians, even Balakiref had not proceeded beyond overtures so far. But it is impossible to say whether Rimsky-Korsakof persisted in his approval of Mussorgsky's unconventionalities in the *Night on the Bare Mountain* after he had seen the score: the Memoirs contain only a brief colourless reference to his first contact with this work.

Balakiref's refusal to have anything to do with the *Night on the Bare Mountain* and the reasons he gave for it must have cut Mussorgsky to the quick. In a letter to Rimsky-Korsakof of which only the last part has been preserved (it is permissible to surmise that the remainder was destroyed for the reason that it contained even more vehement expressions of annoyance) he gave vent to his ill-humour:

> So people require perfection! Well, consider art throughout history, and you will find no such thing as perfection: at least, not in works on a big scale. Every big work has its flaws, but these do not count; it is the artistic achievement as a whole that counts. We often inveigh against Wagner, but Wagner is powerful, and powerful because he submits the art of music to searching investigations, and does violence to it to achieve his end—which he would not do if he had more 'talent'. [It is obvious that here the word is used in a depreciatory sense.] And Berlioz! And Liszt! In every one of their works there are flaws. We are too severe upon ourselves. All such excuses are dangerous. How can one fail to shudder at the notion of "exercises in scoring for ten instruments"? Yet this is Balakiref's prescription after your *Sadko* and after having discussed my unfortunate 'Witches'. And to want F sharp *à la* Liszt—Dante Symphony—for the glorification of Satan! *Corpo di Bacco!*

This disappointment had come at a moment when it was imperative for him to make headway as a composer. He found it difficult to obtain a new government post, and was earning nothing with his music. Balakiref and his other friends were concerned with his situation, and offered to help him. From Minkino, where he had gone to stay for reasons of economy, he wrote to Balakiref, on 24 September (this is the letter which Liapunof regarded as written in 1862).

Your friendly behest is so imperative, that to ignore it would be, to say the least of it, to sin against all the friends who show such kindness to me. I must show my gratefulness, by deeds, not by mere words. Now if I were without food and without hope, my reply would be such as might be expected from a human being at bay. But as things are, I consider I have no right to frighten my friends and I wish to state my case with all the fairness that their affectionate concern deserves.

It is true that my resources have shrunk, but not to such an extent as altogether to prevent my supporting myself. Being accustomed to comfort, and even to a certain amount of luxury, I felt anxious at first with regard to the future; and no wonder I pulled a wry face—anybody would have done the same in the circumstances. But I beg you, I adjure you, in the name of truth, to set your mind at rest and reassure all my dear friends. I cannot bear the thought that they are anxious on my behalf in consequence of my having conveyed a false impression. The notion that I misled them is most painful to me. Believe me, dear Mily, having lived with my family, and afterwards apart from them for two years, having been pampered and never stinted, free from anxiety as to my future, I had to give serious consideration to my present difficulties. Having carefully gone into figures, I find I cannot afford to return to Petersburg at the beginning of October as I should have wished; but I can manage to live there from November to April or May. This means the sacrifice of one month which otherwise I could have spent in town, in the company of my friends. It's a long time, but I submit rather than worry and see my friends worrying. Surely, all those who genuinely love me will be glad to see me self-supporting rather than roving like a meteor; and they will agree that I am right, since the extra month in the country will mean nearly seven splendid months in Petersburg, and the possibility of carrying on in peace.

I shall try to secure a government appointment (the most hopeful solution), but it seems that there is no chance of one before the New Year. Please get the meaning of all this clear, be reassured, and reassure my friends. You must!

The change in my circumstances has affected me but slightly, and for a short time. Being naturally buoyant, I soon came round, and I intend to stand firm. My spleen was not the outcome of the autumn in the country nor of my financial affairs. It was an 'author's spleen', I confess to my shame: I was embittered by your attitude to my 'Witches'. I considered, still consider, and shall continue to consider that my work is satisfactory. After having composed various small things of my own, I come forth with my first big independent achievement. Well, the spleen has gone, as all things go, I have become accustomed to my position as a composer, and I am now starting on a new work, the pine-laden air stimulating me to activity. Whether you agree to produce my 'Witches' or not, dear friend, I shall alter neither the plan nor the working out: for both are in close relationship with the contents of the scene, and carried out in a spirit of genuineness, without trickery or make-believe. Every artist remembers the disposition governing the planning and carrying out of his work, and this remembrance does a good deal towards helping him to abide by his own standards. I have accomplished my task to the best of my ability. The one thing I will alter is the percussion, which I have misused.

I embrace you with all my heart and again thank you for your message: it is good, very good to feel surrounded by good-will and warm friendship—it is better than tons of money.

Here we have Mussorgsky at his most lovable, and exactly as described in the recollections of his friends: warm-hearted and sensitive, proud and unassuming, responsive and restrained, firm in his convictions, and courteous in his defence of them. But this is the last letter of the kind he wrote to Balakiref. The breach between them soon widened. The time was not far distant when Balakiref, after a serious nervous breakdown (the aftermath of his losing battles against musical officialdom and his vain efforts to keep the Free School of Music going), was to retire from the musical world and live for nearly five years in complete isolation. But, even before, Balakiref's criticism of *Boris Godunof* had completely estranged Mussorgsky from him (see *infra*, p. 169). The two resumed their friendly relations only in 1878.

CHAPTER VI

Mussorgsky at the End of 1867

Significance of his songs—His realistic aims—Definition of realism in art—The stages of realism in music—Mussorgsky finds himself under the influence of literary and philosophical ideas

MUSSORGSKY at the end of 1867—that is, ten months or so before he started work on *Boris Godunof*—is a particularly interesting subject of study; and it is only by studying him at that point of his evolution that we may hope to discover the contributory causes of the amazing change which took place within him after 1862. Neither his letters nor anything in his works up to that moment could, it is true, be regarded as foreshadowing the advent, in the near future, of an achievement of such magnitude as *Boris Godunof*. Yet, all the elements of his artistic personality, and practically all the aspects of his creative genius, no sign of which is discoverable in his earlier output, are manifest in the best of the songs he turned out between 1863 and 1867; and even *Salammbô*, although given up by him, contained music good and characteristic enough to satisfy the requirements of his mature mind and find place in *Boris*. The series of his admirable peasant songs stood complete except for 'The Orphan' and 'Yeremushka's Lullaby' (and these were composed in January and March 1868 respectively): intensely live and telling portrayals, tragic, or humorous, or even comical, drawn with infinite sympathy and understanding, utterly unlike anything ever done before and to the present day unique in the repertory of song. Lyrical songs, such as 'Night', 'The Garden by the Don', the 'Hebrew Song', and the fanciful, irresponsible 'Magpie' are thoroughly representative, and testify to his capacity for characterization, his imagination, and resourcefulness. With 'The Dnieper', he rises to a level of romantic grandeur foreshadowed in some of the early songs ('King Saul', 'I own many palaces', 'Wild winds blowing'). Practically all the distinguishing features of his mature style, including the shortcomings and weaknesses, real or alleged, are present in these works. They are part and parcel of his style, necessary means towards the ends he had in view; and most of them cannot be altered, under pretext of 'correcting', except for the worse.

In other words, although he had but a handful of short works to show, he had, before reaching his twenty-eighth birthday, thoroughly found himself. As an artist, he tells us in his autobiography, he matured under the influence, on the one hand, of the musicians around him, and on the other hand of writers and scientists among whom he names Lamansky, Turgenief, Kostomarof, Grigorovitch, Pissemsky, and Shevtchenko. This is an important statement, but one that requires careful investigation. Russian biographers have not called this particular point into question. Gerald Abraham[6] inclines to regard it as a piece of window-dressing, on a par with the reference to the 'triumphant' concert tour with Leonova and the assertion that *Khovanshchina* and *The Sorotchintsi Fair* were going through the press. Neither Karenin's nor Andreï Rimsky-Korsakof's comments imply doubt as to Mussorgsky's truthfulness on this subject. And anyhow, supposing for the sake of argument that he exaggerated the closeness of his personal relations with these writers, it remains more than likely that he learnt much from their writings, and found in them much food for thought. And if we admit this, we find a reasonably satisfactory explanation—and indeed the only one discoverable in the present state of our knowledge—of the change that took place in him.

The more we study his output, the more clearly we realize that the composers around him exercised on him but a general, limited influence. Of those whose works he studied under Balakiref's guidance, Beethoven, Berlioz, Liszt and Schumann impressed him most. He loved and understood Schubert, and he studied Gluck diligently, but his musical style owes little to either. From Wagner he learnt very little, except as regards the possible functions of leitmotives. Glinka's influence is noticeable in his lyrical music and also in the few examples of musical orientalism his output includes; that of Balakiref, likewise Dargomyjsky's, great as regards outlook and aims, was very small from the actual musical point of view, and did not make itself felt before 1867—the period of *The Stone Guest.*

The main influence from the musical point of view was that of Russian folk-music (see chapter XVI), which worked on him quite otherwise than it did on Balakiref, Borodin, and Rimsky-Korsakof. But, even after having made full allowance for these various formative influences, to establish a genealogy of his musical style remains an almost insoluble problem.

The first step towards a solution consists in noting that his music, while having in certain respects close affinities with that of his Russian colleagues, was in the last resort so fundamentally different as to remain practically a sealed book to them. Later, it came to stand out as something apart and unique. But his colleagues regarded it as mainly freakish, and he realized soon enough that between their ideals and his own there was an unbridgeable gulf; whereas the aesthetic, social, and philosophical (or pseudo-philosophical) ideas he exchanged with his non-musical friends, the literature he read, the tendencies that were gaining ground in all fields outside music, provided him with views on the function of art in general and of music in particular which he found illuminating—with a definite goal which attracted him strongly. When, years later, he complained to Stassof that "whereas he could usually listen with profit to the conversations of other artists, he seldom heard his fellow-composers express a live thought" (13/25 July, 1872), he was referring, no doubt, to old as well as to recent experiences. So there is no reason to regard the reference in the autobiography to the influence of writers and scientists as only a piece of 'window-dressing'. In point of fact, all tends to show that this influence was not merely general, but specific; that it not only gave a direction to his art, but contributed more directly than that of any composer (although, of course, in a less obvious way) to his progress, and even to the formation of his musical style.

No doubt the notion that general aesthetic, philosophical, and sociological ideas could have a crystallizing effect on a composer's style is (as pointed out by Frank Howes[18]) paradoxical. Fortunately, there is no lack of evidence to support Mussorgsky's own statement to that effect. As a youth, he was greatly interested in the life around him, and displayed a gift for keen observation: but nothing of this appeared in his early music. It was only from 1863 onwards—that is, from the moment he joined the 'commune' and began to develop "an earnest, strictly scientific turn of mind"—that the character of his music started changing. So the natural conclusion is that the cumulative effect of his own thinking and of his reactions to other people's 'live' ideas was to compel him to take stock and explore; to enquire more and more searchingly into the properties of all the expressive elements he used, whether rhythms or melodies or harmonies or colours, and their combinations; and never to rest satisfied until he had discovered the specific accent, turn, or arrangement best suited to the requirements of the moment; and to provide him, as will presently appear, not with actual musical ideas or means, of course, but with standards which, although elastic and even indecisive from the musical point of view, were in many respects positive enough—especially with his genius as touchstone. His instinctive interest in the simple people, in the peasants, in all that was characteristically Russian increased; he developed a deep mistrust of the notion of art for art's sake, and his ambitions centred on reality in art, or, as most writers put it, realism (the various senses in which this most misleading term is used will be considered presently).

As everybody knows, the history of Russian thought and literature at that time is that of the growth of those two very elements: interest in the life and psychology of the simple people, and interest in 'true to life' methods of treatment. In order to account for the formation of Mussorgsky's artistic personality, it is useful to consider many writers, older or contemporary, whom he does not name because he never had any personal contact with them (this, as will be remembered, was presumably his reason for striking Dostoevsky out of his list). The following quotations from two famous essays printed in the 'forties and 'fifties respectively, may serve as examples:

> In proportion as Russian literature became independent and national, it became a vital necessity for writers to turn all their attention to the people. . . . Gogol won the day because he directed art to reality exclusively, apart from any question of ideals. The ideal was no longer to beautify (that is, to lie) but to find the correlation between the types created and the thought which had determined their creation. He depicted ordinary human beings, not pleasant exceptions only. Nature is the eternal model of art, and the greatest, most noble subject in nature is man. Is a peasant not a man? His soul, heart, passions are the same as the cultured man's. . . . The idea of a pure, exclusive art, aloof and segregated within its own sphere is an abstract, visionary idea.* (Bielinsky).
>
> Beauty is life . . . reality is not only more live but more perfect than

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* Compare: (a) Philaret's declaration in his reminiscences that his brother considered a mujik "a genuine human being"; (b) in Mussorgsky's letter to Stassof of 18 October 1872, *infra,* p. 126.

fancy. . . . The scope of art is not restricted to beauty in the aesthetic sense of the term. Art should represent everything in life which is of interest to human beings. Representation of life is the very essence of art. Certain works of art not only represent, but express life—they are judgments on the facts of life. (Chernyshevsky).*

The men whom Mussorgsky names preached and practised the same doctrines. Grigorovitch (1822–1900) and Turgenief (1818–83) were among the first Russians to introduce serfs into fiction, describing them with warm sympathy—the former in tales written in the 'forties, the latter in his well-known *Annals of a Sportsman* (1847). Pissemsky (1820–81) was "unrivalled in his time as a painter of North-Russian mujiks, in tales published in the 'fifties. In 1863 or so, he was exercising a great influence in Petersburg, which he left for Moscow in 1863".†

Vladimir Lamansky, in 1867, was a lecturer in Russian history. Two years before, he had denounced, in a pamphlet entitled 'Nationality, Italian and Slavonic, from the point of view of politics and literature', the evil influence of German poetry and literature, which were diverting the Russians from studying the Greek and Romanic cultures, and had fostered a taste for abstraction and artifice. He was a keen believer in artistic nationality, and an enthusiast of folk-lore.

Kostomarof (1817–85) was a historian who in his work strove above all things to "give the first place to the life of the people in all its typical aspects" (his own words in his *Autobiography*, Petersburg, 1890). In 1871, he published a book on the historical significance of Russian folk-poetry, and also a *History of the Raskol and the Raskolniki*, which may have contributed to awaken Mussorgsky's interest in this subject (see *infra*, chapters VIII, XIII and XIV on *Khovanshchina*). Like his close friend, the poet Shevtchenko, Kostomarof was a Little Russian; and these two, jointly, may have helped to direct Mussorgsky's attention to the possibilities of Little Russian atmosphere and character (see chapter XIII).

Kostomarof, by the way, seems to have been the only one of the non-musician friends named in the autobiography who ever expressed approval of Mussorgsky's works—describing *Boris Godunof* as "a live page of history". Kavelin (1818–85), by his many pamphlets written between 1855 and 1862, played an important part in bringing about the liberation of the serfs. In 1868 he published a long review of Troitsky's book *German Psychology during the Present Century, a historical and critical investigation, with a preface on the achievements of English psychology from the times of Bacon and Locke* (1867), in which he unrestrictedly endorsed Troitsky's thesis that "the duty of psychology is the empirical study of psychological and physiological facts jointly", and concluded with the remark, "German psychology after Kant is a legend at the basis of which lies truth, but not that truth which this psychology propounds".

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* *The Aesthetic Relation of Art to Reality*, 1855 (quoted by Gliebof^{5}).

† Pissemsky: *Works* (Petersburg, 1910), 8 vols. Preface by V. Zelinsky.

Gliebof[3] finds points of contact between Troitsky's doctrines and Mussorgsky's. The book may have contributed to strengthening Mussorgsky's belief in empiricism as the path to artistic truth: but he may merely have felt the same as regards the chapter 'Music as the expression of feelings' in Gervinus's *Handel and Shakespeare* (1868). But, by the time these books appeared, he had reached so advanced a stage of development that no question of formative influence arises.

As regards Virchow, it is difficult to discover what Mussorgsky may have learnt from the writings of this gifted and versatile pathologist, anthropologist, and politician. The references to him and to Gervinus in the autobiography may have been intended simply as sops for the German users of Riemann's Dictionary.

Even a brief survey such as the above must contain some reference to Dostoevsky. It is true that his influence on Mussorgsky was of another order, and will be more profitably considered in relation to the psychology of *Boris Godunof*. As regards realism and empiricism, however, Lapshin[16] appositely quotes the following passage from Dostoevsky's diary: "People call me a psychologist. They are wrong: I am simply a realist in the higher sense of the term." His views on the value of graphic, realistic suggestion are illustrated by his saying to a writer who had described the throwing of pennies to an organ man in the street below: "I want to hear that penny hopping and thinking" (quoted in J. Middleton Murry's *The Problem of Style*, London, 1922).

This evidence is conclusive enough. It shows all Mussorgsky's ideals formulated clearly and fully. But it remained for him to find his own solution of the musical problems confronting him. What, exactly, were these problems? Ever since Stassof bestowed upon him the epithet 'realist', people have gone on repeating it for purposes of praise or blame, or even of definition pure and simple, without ever troubling to inquire into the meaning of the term. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* sums up current definitions as follows: "Realism, in art, is opposed to idealism in various senses. The realist artist is: (1) he who deliberately declines to select his subjects from the beautiful or harmonious, and more especially he who describes ugly things and brings out details of an unsavoury sort;* (2) he who deals with individuals, not types; (3) most properly, he who strives to represent facts exactly as they are."

The definition will become more accurate if we add that realism is also opposed to formalism (in a sense which will be explained presently) and to romanticism (taken as implying sentimental or melodramatic treatment and magnification). It is incredible that critically minded writers could ever have accepted the first meaning, which is in flagrant contradiction with the trend. Representing facts as they really are means exaggerating neither their beautiful nor their ugly features. Bielinsky praised Gogol for having depicted "ordinary human beings, not pleasant exceptions only". Had the doctrine of ugliness being the necessary condition of realism existed in his time, he surely would have added "nor unpleasant exceptions". When Séailles (in *Le génie dans l'art*) averred that "realism never exists: that which is given this name is, as often as not, an idealization of the ugly", he failed to take into account that there might be no idealization either way. Idealizing methods remain exactly the same whether applied to the beautiful or to the ugly. A rose-garden may be described realistically, and a sewer idealistically and romantically (cases in point in Zola's novels leap to the mind). The one humorous, unsavoury detail in Rembrandt's 'Ganymed' does not make for realism in the aesthetic sense any more than the depiction of a company of gods and goddesses preparing to welcome the new-comer to Olympus would necessarily make for idealization. And if Mussorgsky's evocations of peasants and humble folk are realistic *par excellence*, it is because of their conception and execution, not on account of their subjects.

Indeed, an artist, be he writer or painter or musician, may select a most definitely realistic subject (say, in accordance with the second definition above, and not a type—one, moreover, in which all the conflicting or irrelevant features which co-exist in reality are present); he may have a thoroughly realistic vision of it—

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* Riesemann[12] quotes this first definition but not the following two, thereby greatly simplifying matters for himself.

that is one which will embrace all its features, exaggerating or belittling none—and yet fail to give us a realistic presentment of it. The truth of the matter is that the essential is the method of interpretation, the treatment.

All arts proceed by some kind of interpretation and formalization—that is, selection, elimination, and marshalling of features. Formalization unavoidably tends to create set forms and set relations within these, to extend and generalize expression rather than to foster the specificness which is the aim of realism. Therefore, the ideal of realism is a maximum of efficiency in veracity, and a minimum of formalization. The realistic artist is he who aims at accurate expression, not generalized expression; and, when he has achieved it, does not attempt to add to it. He does not indulge in comments upon the emotions which his subjects arouse in him. The one order of emotions which he tries to communicate is that which he finds in the character of his subjects. And so he places in the foreground these subjects (the cause of his emotions) and not his reactions to them, trusting that this will be the surest way of communicating the right kind of emotion. No other way of representing facts as they really are is conceivable in art.

This is exactly the realism which the Russian writers stood for, and which Mussorgsky aimed at in turn. But his critics have not made clear whether he was a realistic composer, or simply a composer and a realist. Had they tried to do so, they would have found themselves compelled to thrash out the questions: can musical realism exist? and if so, what does it consist in? And they would have discovered that it can and does exist—only within certain limits, but still as a definite and special type; and that it had been the ideal of many composers before Mussorgsky.

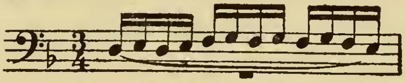
Only two kinds of instrumental music can aim at "representing facts as they really are". The first is generally called imitative music. This again is a term which most writers use loosely. Admitting that it should apply exclusively to music whose sounds and rhythms aim at imitating other sounds and sonorous rhythms,* it stands to reason that the utmost a composer can do in this line is to invent suitable small imitative units or motifs, which must be either not worked out at all or worked out in exactly the same way as the most abstract motifs would be. The imitative principle can give us lovely things such as the rustling leaves in Wagner's 'Waldweben'; inane and atrocious things such as the bleating

* On this point, see the present writer's article on programme music.[21]

sheep in Strauss's *Don Quixote*; and things that are neither good nor bad in themselves, and should be judged solely by what the composer does with them, as the anvils in *Rheingold*. In other words the question is hardly worth considering.

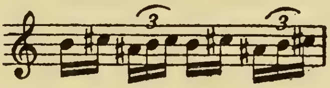
Far more important is the realistic process which might be labelled imitation in the sonorous rhythms of music, of non-sonorous rhythms; or, more properly, rhythmic transposition. Physiology teaches us that motions (and also shapes) are perceived not by the visual sense alone, but by the visual and the muscular sense jointly; because the eye must move in order to perceive them. So the shape (or design) and rhythm of motion, which take place in space and time jointly, naturally become object-models of which music can provide close equivalents in its own designs and rhythms. Again, the range of possibilities extends from the crudest to the most subtle. A famous instance of the former is the figure in one of Kuhnau's Bible Sonatas (1700), representing the swinging of David's sling and the flight of the stone. Strauss represents Don Quixote thrown by the windmill in almost exactly the same way. There are in Mussorgsky's output two evocations of the movement of writing: quietly carried on in *Boris Godunof*,

Ex.10



erratic and flustered in *Khovanshchina*,

Ex.11



Human motion, a gesture, is often determined by, and very often associated with human emotion. Therefore, music may naturally correspond to it from the expressive as well as from the matter-of-fact rhythmic point of view. Indeed, as often as not, it can hardly do the one without the other. The realistic artist, not being primarily concerned with expressing emotions, may set out to achieve as accurate and graphic musical equivalents of gestures as possible without giving a thought to their dramatic or pathetic associations: but the result may be most suggestive and moving from the purely musical point of view. The above examples are cases in point:

Mussorgsky could hardly have done better had he set out to express, without any idea of realistic imitation, on the one hand the serene, austere mood of the monk Pimen at work on his chronicle, and, on the other hand, the terror of the scribe compelled to write a letter of denunciation which may mean his death. Here we clearly see how the realist in the higher sense of the term becomes a psychologist.

In fact, it may easily happen that listeners or students will overlook the realistic evocation: the present writer never noticed it until his attention was called to it by his colleague Gerald Abraham. But in the face of the evidence (which includes directions in the score) it is impossible to deny that in both instances Mussorgsky did actually think first and foremost of the motion of the writing hand. That he should have done so is quite natural: there is plenty of evidence that his imagination was fundamentally of the visual-motion type. (This thesis[39] was accepted by Lapshin[16] and Gliebof.)

And this helps us to understand how he came to develop so great a capacity for strikingly graphic evocation, his realistic processes always remaining under control of his sense of character and of fitness generally. "Nothing matters", he once wrote to Stassof, "provided the result is musical and artistic".

Here again, realism provides nothing but principles applicable to the construction of small units, and independent creative imagination has to do the rest. There is no need to carry this investigation of realism in instrumental music any further: it is chiefly in Mussorgsky's vocal and dramatic compositions that we see it at work. For a while, his belief in the capacity of instrumental music for circumstantial, elaborate, and prolonged description may have been as strong as that of Berlioz and, later, Richard Strauss: his letter to Nikolsky on 'The Witches' (see p. 73) seems to indicate as much. But this was but a transient phase.

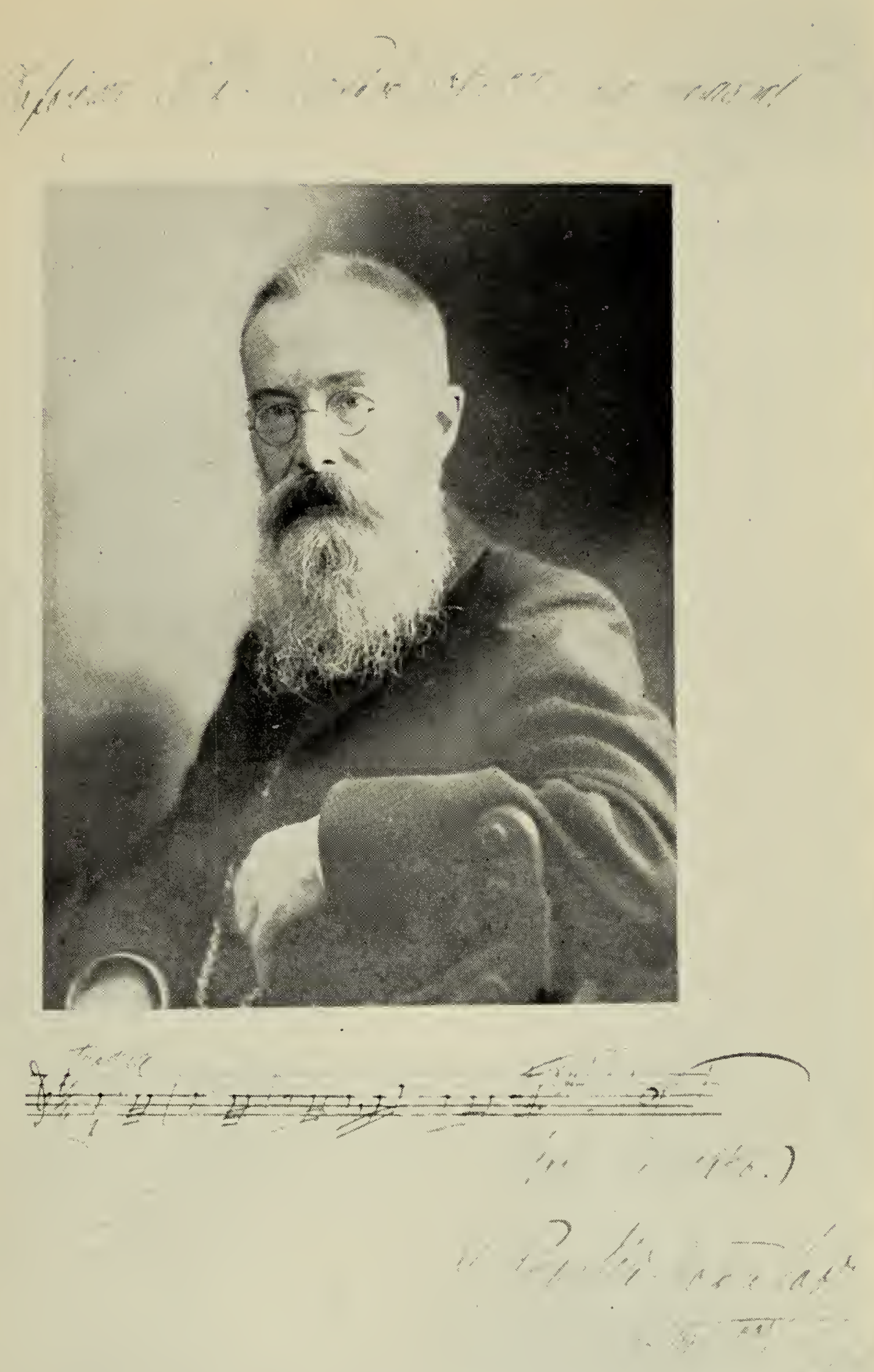
In vocal and especially in dramatic music, realism consists in true, direct characterization, founded on a thorough understanding of what is to be observed in life, and a scrupulous choice of the closest, tersest, and simplest possible equivalents—imagination, of course, having the last say. So far as possible, declamation will follow the rhythms and intonations of human speech. The co-operating instrumental music will provide other elements of characterization and directly relevant suggestions—indications of bearing, movements, and so on. As early as the sixteenth century, composers of vocal music had begun to experiment in that direction, "marking typical attitudes and gestures, and aptly translating them into music".[34] Later, instrumental music followed suit.

The notion that declamation, dramatic or lyrical, should be modelled upon the natural flow of speech was formulated before opera came into being. It is set forth in Orazio Vecchi's preface to his *Amfiparnasso* (1594). It governed the experiments of the Florentine *cenacolo* which created the *stilo recitativo*. Vincenzo Galilei, in his *Dialoghi della Musica antica e moderna* (Florence, 1602), inveighed against the traditions of 'gothic counterpoint' and preached a return to a simplicity the model of which, he averred, was to be found in old Greek art—an art whose tradition the 'barbarians', the mediaeval contrapuntists, had destroyed. A passage in the introduction describes "men fallen into a heavy lethargy of ignorance devoid of all desire to acquire knowledge, knowing as much of music as they did of the West Indies, obstinate in their blindness until the moment when a few men started trying to enlighten them". Galilei and Count Bardi, the leader of the *cenacolo*, devoted much time and labour to creating a 'representative style' of singing. The first result of these labours, Galilei's setting of Ugolino's lament in Dante's *Divina Commedia* (this earliest example of *stilo rappresentativo* has not reached us) delighted the Bardi circle, but "stirred violent discussions, and great anger among the musicians of the old school. These musicians scoffed at the reformers' pretension to do away with all the resources of musical art for the sake of formless, amateurish babble".[21,36] (This might be a description of the attitude of the musicians of the old school to Mussorgsky's music—see *infra*, chapters XI and XII).

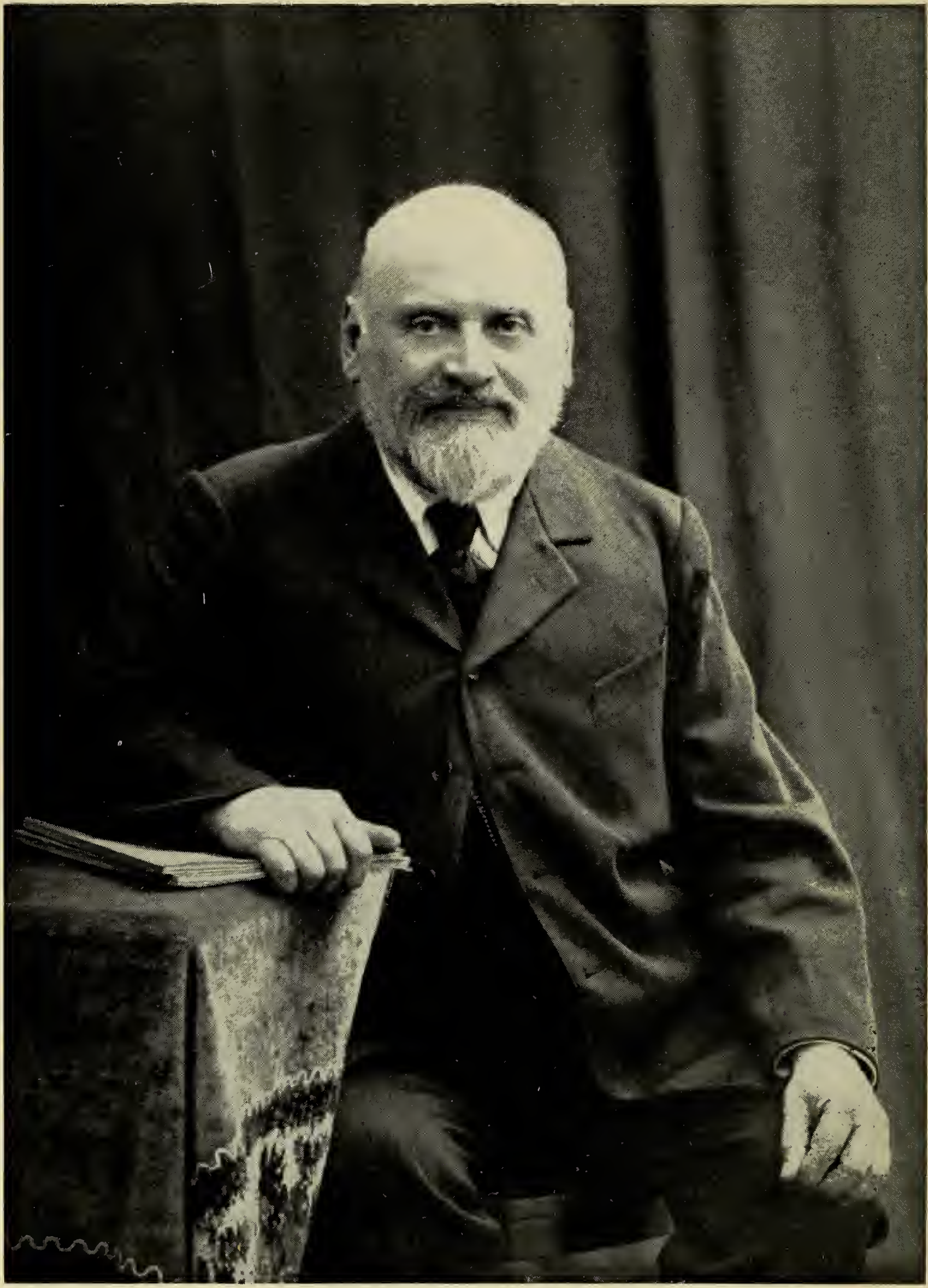
Caccini, in his *Nuove Musiche* (Florence, 1601) expressed his desire to invent a style of singing which would be "speech in music, and in music whose composition and interpretation would depend far more upon intelligence of the ideas and words than upon knowledge of counterpoint". Riemann, in his Dictionary (article on 'Opera'), notes his careful avoidance of set forms. Peri, assisted by his friends Rinuccini the poet and Corsi the composer, aimed at creating "a style more elaborate than that of ordinary speech, less formalized than actual song, and so standing midway" (Preface to his opera *Euridice*, 1600). He studied "the intonations of the Italian language, the character acquired by the human voice under the influence of passions; the first result of this work was the opera *Dafne* (1594, not preserved). Bardi praised him for having achieved, by very simple means, an exact imitation of everyday speech".[21] Gagliano, in the preface to his own *Dafne* (Florence, 1608), "lays stress on the value of good, realistic acting, in which all gestures agree with the music. The chorus plays a live and important part in this opera; in the final scene, it becomes the principal character".[21] Monteverdi, "although more interested in purely musical devices, was yet concerned with imitating human feelings; we see him constantly seeking and finding picturesque expressive effects, new rhythms and tone-colours, and above all things movement and variety. Artusi's famous criticism of his music, although excessive, accurately emphasizes certain of its idiosyncrasies which are both defects and qualities. Monteverdi, fascinated by the life around him, over-eager to translate its pulse into music, and lacking the rich and supple technique which later masters were to command, did not always achieve perfect order. . . . He was ever striving to sum up characters or passions in melodic phrases. Dramatic melody, and not simply the recitative, is the basis of his operas. In proportion as he advanced in age, his interest in realism increased. He gave us with *L'Incoronazione di Poppea*, the first example of the most realistic form of operatic art: the historic opera".[21]

All this comes very close to Mussorgsky's theory and practice. In France, too, the idea had been in the air ever since Jean Antoine de Baïf, in his preamble to a scheme for the foundation of an Academy of poetry and music submitted to King Charles IX (the Academy was founded in 1570), proclaimed that "the ideal of musical art was to represent speech in accomplished harmony and melody of song, so as to produce the effects required by the words".[36] It provided the basis of Lully's study of stage-declamation, of his strictly syllabic, unadorned, recitative style, of his experiments in changes of metre. It accounts for Destouches's occasional practice of "using chords at times boldly dissonant—for specific expressive purposes, regardless of their relations to the tonal scheme".[21] It is expressed in the writings of many theorists, from Lecerf de la Viéville to Rousseau, and it became the leitmotive, so to speak, of the literature of the 'querelle des bouffons' and of the Gluck-Puccini controversy. It is set forth in Grétry's Memoirs. And both Rameau and Gluck preached and practised it.

The former's writings teem with remarks such as: " song must



Rimsky-Korsakof



Mily Balakiref

imitate speech; one must appear to be speaking, not singing. A good composer must merge himself in every character he depicts. When at work, he should forget all rules that might enslave his genius and become useful only when his genius and his ear prove unable to give him what he is aiming at." He despised "the school that deals in notes and notes only, sacrificing sense, feeling, and reason" (letter to Houdard de la Motte[38]). Gluck, in his preface to *Alceste* (1769), explained that "he had sought to reduce music to its true function: that of seconding poetry with the object of reinforcing the expression of feelings and the interest of situations without interrupting the action or burdening it with superfluous arguments; and had willingly sacrificed every conceivable rule for the sake of effectiveness." In the dedicatory epistle to *Paride ed Elena* he reverted to the last point, inveighing against "the pedants who dissected his scores in order to find infractions of theoretical rules". Elsewhere he declared that "when starting work, his first concern was to forget that he was a composer". Gevaert, in his re-edition of *Iphigénie en Aulide* (Lemoine, Paris), points out that "here, no concession is made to musical amplifications, to polyphonic working-out, or to beauty of tone. Everything that would merely tend to round off, to adorn, or stand merely as framework is systematically ignored."

Again most of the passages quoted (be they declarations of principles or descriptions and assessments of results) might apply almost word for word to Mussorgsky as revealed in his music and his correspondence. No undue value should be ascribed to the resemblance, but it is worth noting. Two useful points emerge from the above summary survey: firstly, that in Mussorgsky's time there was nothing novel in the idea of realism, of 'truth before beauty' in music; and secondly, that the realistic principle has a value of its own, and also limitations which for an unimaginative composer would be no less deadening than the limitations of school routine: creative imagination alone can transcend either order of limitation. That Mussorgsky, starting from the realistic principle, should often have proceeded in exactly the same way as composers of past periods who had nourished similar ambitions is instructive, provided we do not misinterpret the plain fact. It is hardly needful to point out that he knew very little of old music and theories generally (except Gluck's), and certainly nothing of the Florentine *cenacolo*, de Baïf, or even Rameau. All in his musical processes that resembles theirs—musical discourse based on speech, unusual chords resorted to for their expressive, not their tonal value, changes of meter and rhythm, avoidance of mere formal devices, and so on—was spontaneously rediscovered by him under the influence of his realistic intentions. For this reason, such parallelisms as can be discovered are all the more interesting. They show that the positive consequences of the realistic principle are practically constants, but neither many nor very far-reaching. The principle itself, in music, leads nowhere in particular and may lead almost anywhere. Its main advantage is that it prescribes the avoidance of flagrant artifices of formalization, of abstract methods of working-out, of exaggeration and embellishment. One might say that it is more positive in its prohibitions than in its actual suggestions.

In other words, it is no more fertile than it is sterile. It is worth exactly what the practice is, neither more nor less. The realistic aims of Dargomyjsky's *Stone Guest* add no more to its artistic value than the absence of such aims detracts from the artistic value of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. The realistic theory may help to account for a good many factors in Mussorgsky's music, but not in the least for the one and only factor that really matters—the Mussorgsky factor. The music of Mussorgsky in his maturity owes its significance, not to the fact that he aimed at realism, but to the fact that he was endowed with genius. This genius of his asserts itself no less typically and convincingly in works such as the song-set *Sunless*, whose lack of realism Cui and Stassof were to perceive quite rightly, and foolishly to deplore. But there can be no question that even there he benefited by the habit he had developed of submitting his methods to searching criticism, of avoiding, not only approximations and commonplaces, but also much that other composers might have been tempted to do for purely musical reasons, for the sake of beautification, rounding-off, or self-display. And, when we observe in his music realistic features, we realize that the principle served a good purpose as soon as we feel at the same time that the results are satisfying as music, music that lives its own life and speaks its own language, music instinct with the autonomous significance which the realistic principle seemed to negate. That these qualities are present in Mussorgsky's music is a point upon which those of us who first became acquainted with his songs and *Boris Godunof* without knowing a word of Russian, at a time when no translations were available, could speak feelingly.

To sum up: apart from feeling confirmed in his ambition to be, first and last, a true Russian, he learnt, under these various influences, to observe reality closely, seeking its exact equivalent in music, and to study the people around him; to study them as human beings and individuals, lovingly to investigate "the subtle idiosyncrasies of individuals and crowds";* and above all, of the humble people, whose depiction plays so great a part in his mature works.

No sign of either inclination appears in anything he turned out before 1864. Nothing of the kind had ever been done in song or in opera. And Savishna's wooer, the peasant mothers rocking their babies to sleep ('Yeremushka', 'The Peasant's Lullaby') the carefree 'Kallistrat', the people in *Boris Godunof*, are not only unique and inimitable but so vivid-limned by Mussorgsky's music as to be realistic figures *par excellence.*

He had also developed a capacity for writing suitable texts: the words of 'Savishna', 'The Seminarist', 'The Ragamuffin', 'The He-Goat', and 'The Classicist' were of his own devising. 'Savishna' was a special case from both the literary and the musical points of view, since his purpose in it had been to evoke not an imaginary scene but a scene actually witnessed. But 'The Seminarist' and 'The Ragamuffin' suffice to show his gift for racy and imaginative evocations in words.

His work on the libretto and music of *Salammbô* was useful practice and contributed, no doubt, to ripen his ideas on dramatic music, but he still stood in need of experience in the handling of dramatic dialogue. This he was to acquire in 1868 by his work on Gogol's comedy *The Marriage.*

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* Letter to V. Stassof, 18 October, 1872.

CHAPTER VII

1868

Mussorgsky sets to music an act of Gogol's comedy The Marriage—*His enthusiasms—His decision not to proceed further—His dissertations on aesthetics—The music of* The Marriage—*Life with the Opotchinins—Pen-portraits by friends—Starts work on* Boris Godunof

THE year 1868 was one of great activity and high hopes for the nationalist Russian composers, especially in the domain of opera. Balakiref had not yet given up the idea of *The Fire-Bird*, an opera which he had begun planning in 1863 and for which he had composed, Rimsky-Korsakof records, very lovely music. Cui was finishing *Ratcliffe*. Borodin had been working at *The Tsar's Bride*, and, having lost interest in this subject, had just taken up *Prince Igor*. Rimsky-Korsakof had begun *The Maid of Pskof*; and Dargomyjsky was hard at work on *The Stone Guest*, which was arousing great excitement throughout the circle.

All this was most stimulating for Mussorgsky, who with his songs had already progressed far along his chosen path, but had not been fortunate in the matter of opera. He was in excellent health, mental and physical (the days of intemperance lay far behind, the last outbreak having been in 1865), buoyant, and sure of himself. His friends no longer regarded him as a more or less irresponsible or feeble-minded junior, but watched his work with ever-increasing interest. During the winter and early spring, he turned out 'The Orphan', 'A Child's Song', 'Yeremushka's Lullaby', and 'With Nanny', the first of the *Nursery* set. These last two he inscribed to Dargomyjsky, whom in the dedication of 'With Nanny' he hailed as "the great teacher of musical truth". He orchestrated the accompaniments of the earlier 'Hopak' and 'Night'. In February 'The He-Goat' and 'Hopak' were sung in public by Sariotti and Leonova respectively. In June he began setting to music Gogol's *The Marriage*, an amusing comedy, in prose, of the everyday life of the Russian middle classes—a bold venture suggested to him "by Dargomyjsky in jest, and by Cui in all seriousness" (see *infra*, p. 108). He gave up the notion after having composed one act of it, and started work upon *Boris Godunof*, which was to be his masterpiece, in the early autumn. By that time he had found a congenial home in the house of his friends Alexander and Nadejda Opotchinin, where he was to spend three happy years. In December he was reinstated in the service, with the rank of assistant head-clerk in the Forestry Department of the Ministry of State Domains.

The composition of *The Marriage* marked a turning-point in his career. On the face of it, it may seem a pity that he should have devoted so much of his energies to a task which he was soon to give up as impracticable: but the work helped him to sort out and improve his methods, and adjust them to the requirements of the stage. Gogol's comedy, slight, and not aiming at psychological profundity, but live, racy and thoroughly Russian, with its brisk, straightforward dialogue, afforded plenty of opportunities for a composer intent on musical characterization and on discovering musical equivalents of human speech; and it provided the best possible training for him.

On the artistic value of the one act Mussorgsky finished, opinions vary greatly, as will presently appear: but that the music is live and significant enough to exercise a strong, and indeed tantalizing appeal, is proved by the fact that of late years three composers in turn—Ippolitof-Ivanof, Alexander Tcherepnin, and, in Holland, Daniel Ruijneman—have undertaken to complete the unfinished score.

A summary analysis of this first act will help one to understand the allusions and quotations in Mussorgsky's letters referring to his work.

The first of the four scenes it comprises shows the foolish, vain Podkolessin, a government clerk who wishes to get married but is unable to make up his mind on the matter, now thinking over his plans, now questioning his loutish, sorely tried servant Stepan. Did not the tailor who is making the new dress-coat, and the dealer from whom a supply of the best boot-polish has been bought, ask whether the gentleman was contemplating marriage? Is any other coat which the tailor has in hand as fine as the one ordered by Podkolessin? The coming of the marriage-broker, Fiocla, a garrulous old woman who has been calling for months without advancing matters, enables Stepan to escape further questioning. Again (scene 2) she fails to persuade Podkolessin despite her alluring description of the bride-to-be and of her dowry. "If you hesitate much longer," she tells him, "you may never find a wife: already your hair is turning grey." He jumps up, dismayed and angry, to see in a looking-glass whether the shocking assertion can be true.

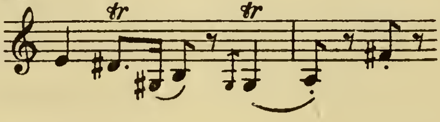
At this juncture (scene 3) enters Kotchkaref, a friend of Podkolessin's, whose marriage was arranged by Fiocla and has proved a failure. He is maliciously eager to lure Podkolessin into the trap; and, having driven Fiocla away, he proceeds (scene 4) to depict in glowing terms the bliss of married life, and half-coaxes, half-bullies, Podkolessin into preparing to pay a visit to the bride-to-be.

Mussorgsky began setting this first act on 11/23 June in town, and within a few days had written out the first act in vocal score form. Then he left for Shilovo where he spent the whole summer, and continued working there. According to the dates in the manuscript, the second scene was finished on 2/14 July, and the whole act on 8/20 July. His letters to Cui, Rimsky-Korsakof, and others express his delight in the congenial subject, his buoyancy while at work, his conception of his task and his convictions that he had fulfilled it successfully.

To Cui he wrote, on 3/15 July:

My dear César, greeting! Here I am, turned out to grass *en forme et matière*: I live in a cottage, drink milk, remain all day long in the open air, and am not taken back to my stall until night falls. Barely a day or two before my sad departure (sad, because I did not see you before leaving) I finished the first scene of *The Marriage*. The first act is divided into three scenes: the first with Stepan, the second with the broker, the third with Kotchkaref. Guided by your observations and Dargomyjsky's, I have greatly simplified what I had shown you. I have devised for Podkolessin a very satisfactory orchestral phrase, which will be most useful for the proposal scene:

Ex. 12



Dargomyjsky, apparently, is quite pleased with it. It crops up for the first time in the course of Podkolessin's talk with Stepan, under the words: "And did he not ask . . ." (referring to the marriage, in short). As you see, it is but a fragment of a theme. The whole theme will appear in the third act, at the moment of the formal proposal—that is, when Podkolessin has made up his mind to get married. It will be easy to express, with its help, his stupid confusion. I have hit upon a good sally for Stepan. When his master calls him for the third time, he comes forward sulkily, although, of course, careful to hide his annoyance. And barely has Podkolessin uttered the words: "I wanted to ask you, broker, whether . . .", than he snaps out, *fortissimo*: "The old woman is here!" thus putting an end to his master's wearisome questions.

The second scene is outlined in rough draft. "Only curs lie!" and "grey hair" have come out well. The little scene, I think, is good and interesting. At the end Podkolessin's bear-like fussing about, at the words "grey hair", is very curiously dealt with. Now I am tackling Kotchkaref. All told, this first act, in my opinion, may be regarded as an experiment in *opéra dialogué*. I should like to have it ready before winter. Then we may judge competently. Kotchkaref *sera fait spécialement pour vous, mon cher*. Tell your dear wife that the scene with Fiocla is a success: she will be glad. All thanks to her for her sympathetic interest in my rash undertaking.

Just now, contrary to my usual practice, I begin with a rough draft, because I have no piano. I'll set the thing in order when I come back to town. As I don't know whether Korsinka is still there or has sailed "towards the icy rocks of Finland" to cool down the fiery "Antar",* I pray you, dear friend, to read this scrawl of mine to him if he is interested.

Now what about yourself? *Comment cela va-t-il avec la versification?* Are we not a blessed little circle? Whenever we run short of texts, we make shift to turn them out ourselves—and not so badly either. Have you advanced the scoring much? How goes it with the final draft? In my *opéra dialogué*, I do my utmost to note down clearly those changes of intonation that crop up in human conversation for the most futile causes, on the most insignificant words—changes in which lies, I think, the power of Gogol's humour. For instance, in the first scene, Stepan's tone changes suddenly from ingratiating to sullen when his master starts fussing about the boot-polish. Fiocla is ever jumping from boastful chatter to rudeness or to testy sallies. Anyhow, you will judge for yourself.

Postscript, July 10: The posting of this letter was most opportunely delayed. The first act is finished. It rained for three days without a break, and I worked without a break, so accustomed are we to fall into line with the weather. *The Marriage* gave me no peace, and now I have finished. Instead of three scenes, there are four: it was unavoidable. Now the weather is fine again, and I am resting.

On 30 July/11 August, he wrote to Rimsky-Korsakof:

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* The descriptive symphony which Rimsky-Korsakof was engaged in composing.

If you have seen Cui, you will know that the first act of *The Marriage* is finished. And if you know this, you cannot doubt that I have been working hard. Cui has annoyed me by not replying to my letter. When I receive no reply, being suspicious by nature in a way of my own, I imagine that I may have been doing something wrong. When I develop such misgivings, I grow worried, and when I am worried I grow angry. You will easily realize how unpleasant such a situation can be. . . . Tell me all about *Antar* and the scene from *The Maid of Pskof.* I left town without taking leave either of you or of Cui. I went to see him twice without finding him at home. I had to leave in a hurry because my brother, in whose house I am living, had to return to town without delay. And as this is my first visit to the Tula country, it was needful for me to find my way about and to select my accommodation: for we live a very countrified life here, with as much comfort as possible under very unfavourable conditions. The place is getting organized, however, because we have a railway line. Before that, one had to live more or less the life of a bailiff.

I have been surveying my first act. It is, I feel, carried out interestingly enough, but who can tell? I have done my best, it will be for you to judge the result. I stand in the dock, and have but one thing to say: if you forget all operatic traditions and think of musical dialogue carried out on the stage without ever a second thought or a trace of self-consciousness, then *The Marriage* is an opera. I mean that if the expression in tone of human thought and feeling as it takes place in ordinary conversation is accurately reproduced in music, and if the reproduction is musicianly and artistic, then the deed is done. To judge whether I have succeeded or not is your business, not mine. I shall await the verdict stoically.

The task was no easy one. I forged ahead with a will: it just happened that way, but I must add that the task proved most stimulating. Whenever I hear people speaking, whoever is speaking, and, above all, whatever is said, a musical equivalent of what I hear takes shape in my mind. Now, I am resting, but that is no good: I cannot find peace.

The same day he wrote to Liudmila Shestakova:

I am thinking of the second act of *The Marriage* but not putting down details yet, not being in the mood for it. Some day or other the right mood will come, no doubt. I am observing characteristic types of peasants. Men and women alike are well worth studying. How many fresh, racy aspects of the Russian people remain overlooked by art! A few scraps of what life brought to me I have turned into musical imagery for the benefit of those whom I love and who love me. If God grants me health and strength, I shall have a lot to say—but after finishing *The Marriage*. I have now crossed the Rubicon: and *The*

Marriage is a cage in which I must remain imprisoned until I have learnt my lesson. I wish my characters to speak on the stage exactly as people speak in everyday life, and my music to be an artistic reproduction of their speech in every one of its particulars; I want the tones of human speech, which is the external manifestation of thoughts and feelings, to become, without being in any way exaggerated or distorted, truthful, accurate, and so supremely artistic music. Such is my ideal ('Savishna', 'The Orphan', 'Yeremushka', 'The Child'). Now I am at work on *The Marriage.* The effectiveness of Gogol's dialogue depends entirely upon the actors, upon the exactness of their intonation. I aim at supplying the right intonation, by means of music which will make it impossible to go wrong. This is why I regard *The Marriage* as my Rubicon; it is live prose in music. Not for me the casual attitude of our musician poets to plain human speech, free from heroics.

Letters written on 15/27 August to Cui, Rimsky-Korsakof, and Nikolsky are equally characteristic of his frame of mind.

To Cui (from whom he had received a reply in the meantime):

I have tidied up all I had composed, and am learning it by heart in order to be able to show it to you. To learn by heart without using the piano is more difficult than to compose. I shall be back in a week. Just now I am resting; or rather, thinking out the second act. I shall not start writing anything down until I feel the character of the tradespeople at the beginning of this act and the scene with Jevakin and Yaitchnitsa coming out in colours as adequate as those I succeeded in finding for Kotchkaref and Fiocla. A good deal is already taking shape.

I have been observing peasants, men and women, and discovering most appetizing types. One man is the very image of Anthony in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*—Anthony in the forum, delivering his speech by Caesar's corpse: a wise, original, sly mujik he is. All this will be useful to me. And the female types: pure gems! Such is my way: I watch all manner of people, and when the time comes, I limn them. It is great fun.

To Rimsky-Korsakof:

I have been bringing into order the second, third, and fourth scenes of the first act, composed here in the country. I have done this in unexpected circumstances: for the first time in my life, I composed without the help of an instrument: that is, without being able to test what I had written. I thought that in a matter such as musical prose, which implies strangely erratic harmonic conditions, I might not succeed without the help of an instrument. But having received your letter and Cui's, I developed a burning thirst for order, and forthwith copied out all I had composed. To do so proved possible because there were no errors; and so, as soon as the manuscript is bound, I shall be able to show it to you, dear friend. Now I am having a go at learning it by heart. It is rather fun. The second act is taking shape in my mind, but I have not actually started composing it: the time has not yet come. Patience! Otherwise, I might lapse into uniformity of inflexion—the worst of sins in so whimsical a thing as *The Marriage*. The bride-to-be's divination by cards and Jevakin are already shaping.

Rimsky-Korsakof's letter to which this is a reply gave particulars of his work, and especially of his plans for the finale of *Antar*. So Mussorgsky proceeded to discuss his friend's ideas with great vigour. That part of his letter, which is most revealing, will be quoted presently.

Writing to Nikolsky, he gave free rein to his dreams and also to his ingenuous pride in his latest progress.

The Greeks deified nature, man included: and the grandest poetry and art were the outcome. Man is the highest organism in nature: alone on earth he has the gift of speech. If by artistically reproducing human speech, with all its subtle and capricious shades, it is possible to achieve results as natural as the model itself, would this lead to something like a deification of man's gift of speech? If by so doing—using only the simplest means under the rigorous control of the artistic instinct—it is possible to reach the heart, is this not worth doing? And if it is thus possible to capture the actual functioning of the mind at critical moments, is this not worth doing?

You have to prepare a soup before you cook it. In other words: as I am preparing for that task, if only by setting to music Gogol's *Marriage*—a most tricky affair for a musical setting—is it not worth while doing the job thoroughly, and trying to get as near as possible to the wonderful, sacred goal?

Of course the retort might be: why always talk of getting ready? It is high time to carry something through. Well: I began getting ready by composing small things. Now, Gogol's *Marriage* serves as a further preparation. When shall I be ready at last? All I can say is, it must needs be: perhaps a time will come when I shall be ready.

I began with small things, it is true: but no need to be ashamed of it. They gave me a name with a narrow circle, but not a circle of narrow-minded people. They even induced men of no small standing in the world of music to assign to me a task unexampled in the history of the art: that of setting to music prose straight out of life, of turning out musical prose.

How difficult the task was is illustrated by what has befallen my

> humble self. I have composed a whole act-length of musical prose. This act, I think, is a success; but I don't know how the remaining three will go. I know that they will have to be good, but not whether they can be good. Anyhow, I must finish what I have started and then stand my trial.

These letters are most important for students of Mussorgsky's psychology, on account of the light they cast on his artistic ideals, his starting points, and also his character. They reveal to the full his excessive sensitiveness, his love for, and faith in, his friends, and the importance which, despite his uncompromising convictions, he ascribed to winning their approval. As a set-off against his childlike delight in having been entrusted by Dargomyjsky and Cui with the task of setting *The Marriage*, and so bringing into being a new genre, musical prose, there is his consciousness that this, perhaps, is only a further step towards a goal that stands still far, although no longer out of sight. And his "why always be talking of getting ready instead of accomplishing something?" is a shrewd piece of self-criticism. There is wisdom, too, in his reply to it. He shows, behind his excitability, a good measure of self-possession, and also a sense of proportion. He is no longer the youth of 1860, who "felt he had already done quite a lot for Russian music".

There is a good deal of wisdom, too, in his high-flown criticism of the plan for the *Antar* finale and even in the disquisition that follows.

Rimsky-Korsakof had written to him:

> I am now orchestrating 'The joys of power' [the third movement]. As you know, my object is to draw a picture of oriental power rather than to express the feeling of power in the abstract. . . . The movement ends in D major. Then I am thinking of giving the fourth movement (the joys of love) a short introduction based upon the main theme of the introduction in the first.
>
> This will recall the evocation of the Ruins and the Kingdom of the Peri; and it will form a good transition from the D major in which the third movement ends to the D flat of the fourth.
>
> Balakiref will hate 'The joys of vengeance' and be dissatisfied with 'The joys of power', because I do not evoke the latter in a full-size Allegro with plenty of symphonic working-out of the themes. But I shall alter nothing, because I feel I have expressed the idea well. Symphonic working out is not always suitable or desirable.

Mussorgsky took these mild statements as a text for a sermon whose length and vehemence must have surprised Rimsky-Korsakof considerably.

As regards your intentions for 'Power', I have no objection: I consider that Eastern power, in its external manifestations, is not a topic incompatible with the requirements of art, because that power has always tended to express itself in terms of pomp. But as regards 'Love', I object to your idea of an introduction. In my opinion a direct start without preamble—such as you had planned first—is more artistic, simpler, more sincere. Does really aesthetic taste, after the pompous D major, require that A major chord in the horns to lead to the melancholy, pathetic D flat major? And it is you, the Glinka of aesthetics (don't blush!) who say such a thing! What could be more poetical, after the *forte* D major *pomposo* (with which, I remember, your third movement ends) than the melancholy D flat major straight forth without any transition? If the allusion to the Ruins and the Peri, why not follow Senkovsky's original [the poem which had provided the plan for *Antar*] faithfully, and prefix to every movement an introduction on the Ruins and the Peri? And how nonsensical that would be! My view is: the more simply and sincerely you proceed, the better. 'Vengeance' without transitionary precautions, 'Power' likewise: why then, for 'Love', start borrowing from the Germans? This is when I object, and I feel I have a right to: remember *Sadko* and how it ends. Learn that after the C sharp minor and D major, D flat major carries the hero straight above the clouds into that world of Peris, Houris, and other lovely beings where his mind is cleansed and appeased and poetically elevated. O transitions! How many fine things you have ruined!

Now, with regard to symphonic working-out: you seem to be appalled because you write *à la* Korsakof and not *à la* Schumann. Now let me tell you (for you rise above fear—*vous êtes brave*!) that a Russian dish of minced meat and herbs is abomination to a German, whereas we eat it with pleasure (*point de comparaisons, s'il vous plaît: comparaison n'est pas raison*), whereas the *Milchsuppe* or *Kirschensuppe* which the Germans enjoy so greatly is abomination to us. In short, symphonic working-out, as a technical procedure, is a German product exactly as German philosophy—now annihilated by the English psychologists and our own Troïtsky. A German, when thinking, starts by analysing, and then proceeds to demonstrate. Our Russian brother begins by demonstrating, and afterwards may amuse himself with analysing. When you showed us *Antar* at Borodin's house, you had not crept up cautiously to 'Love': you are doing so now. I have nothing further to say about symphonic working-out.

But listen, my dear Korsinka: the act of creation carries within itself the laws of beauty. Inner criticism verifies these laws; and the artist's instinct applies them. Failing either of these elements, there can be no artistic creation. The artist is a law unto himself. When an artist starts remodelling, it means that he is not satisfied. But when, being satisfied, he remodels and maybe spoils a good thing or two in the process, he is Germanizing—repeating that which he has already said. We are not ruminants, but omnivorous animals: contradiction, but natural!

"When you start on such a train of thought, alone, at leisure, you see exactly what is required . . ." [a quotation from *The Marriage*: the opening sentence in the play] to find one's own self. This is the hardest of tasks; one achieves it seldom, but it can be done.

Previous letters had already hinted at his views on his art. Here we have a practically complete exposition of his views on technique. And there can be no doubt that it was his work on *The Marriage* that compelled him to face his problems boldly and solve them uncompromisingly. It is remarkable how thoroughly the conditions set by Gogol's prose text precluded all possibility of stylization: and not only of the mechanical kind against which he so emphatically warned Rimsky-Korsakof, but even of the most legitimate kind. Its character and pace allowed neither preparing points nor dwelling upon them: each one had to be made forthwith or irretrievably missed. Indeed, it must have seemed at the time (when the idea of a composer using not a formal libretto or even a text written on less conventional lines but still with an eye to the musical setting to come, but a play pure and simple—let alone a play in prose—was entirely novel) that the very possibility not only of logical musical treatment, but of elementary co-ordination was ruled out.

Mussorgsky's views on symphonic working-out, as set forth in this letter, had often been quoted; but only the publication of his complete correspondence in 1932 revealed that they were comments on remarks made by Rimsky-Korsakof and not a spontaneous outburst induced by the character of *Antar*. They include much that is as foolish as his rigmarole about German philosophy, but also a measure of truth. It is interesting to mark that, contrary to what might be surmised on the strength of his strictures on working-out, the music of *The Marriage* owes its firmness of structure and tightness of texture to the fact that it consists mainly of skilfully used thematic patterns and derivations—in other words, to the application, at times unconscious maybe, but certainly more often conscious, of a definite principle of working out, further applied in Mussorgsky's masterpiece, *Boris Godunof*, begun that same year 1868. It is not the least wonderful thing about *The Marriage* that, dealing with the unassuming, simple, limited subject lightheartedly and humorously, he should have asserted so earnest a purpose that he achieved, for the first time, most of the essentials of his art.

In the course of the autumn, this first act was given several times in private at Dargomyjsky's house and elsewhere. Of these performances Rimsky-Korsakof gives the following account:

> *The Marriage* aroused great interest. Every one of us was amazed at Mussorgsky's undertaking, delighted with his skilful characterization and with many features of his recitative, but baffled by certain chords and concatenations. Mussorgsky himself sang the part of Podkolessin with all his original and inimitable skill, Alexandra Purgold that of Fiocla, Veliaminof that of Stepan; and Dargomyjsky, keenly interested, copied out, in his own hand, that of Kotchkaref and sang it with relish. All were particularly amused with Fiocla and with Kotchkaref's expatiating on "the little rascals, the little copying clerks" [Podkolessin's children to come] and with the delightfully characteristic accompaniment. Stassof was enraptured. Dargomyjsky said that Mussorgsky had gone rather far. Balakiref and Cui regarded the work as a mere curio, with a few interesting features in the declamation.

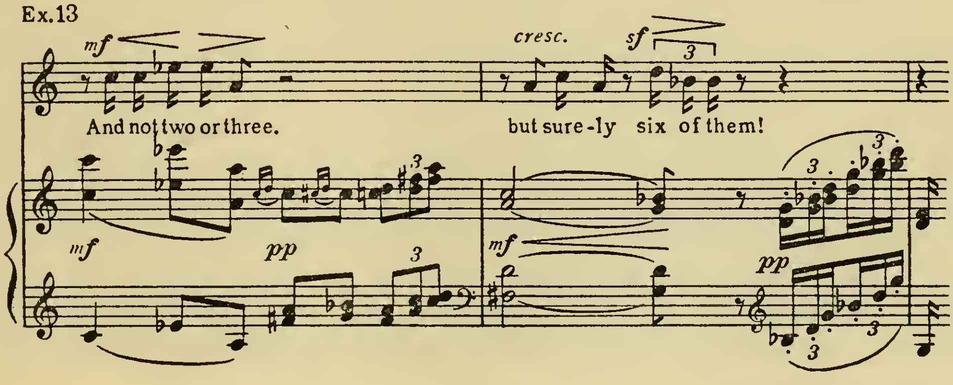
Borodin, in a letter to his wife, of 25 September/7 October, recorded his impressions thus: "*The Marriage* is an unusually curious and paradoxical affair, teeming with innovations and intensely humorous points, but, as a whole, *une chose manquée*, impossible in practice."

So Mussorgsky was disappointed in his hopes: none of his friends, except Dargomyjsky and Stassof, really liked *The Marriage.* For the first time since his ambitions had begun to take shape, the fact was brought home to him that he could not hope for much comprehension on the part of the greater number of them. He must have realized it clearly and felt it deeply: for from that time onwards, it is only in his letters to the Stassofs and to his women friends that confidences as to his plans and sidelights on his work appear. It is unlikely that this lack of response had much to do with his decision to cast *The Marriage* aside. Far-fetched reasons have been given to account for this decision. Rimsky-Korsakof, in his preface to the published edition of 1908, expresses the view, justified by the facts and by the letters quoted above, that he recognized this work to be a mere experiment which it was not needful to carry further; and also the conviction that had Mussorgsky reverted to it later, he would have smoothed down much of the music, "which", he says, "as it stands, contains much that no fastidious ear could accept." Karatyghin, too, taking a rather short-sighted view of Mussorgsky's realistic processes in *The Marriage*, argues[28] that he soon became dissatisfied with his work:

> At times, this infallible naturalism is carried so far that it becomes freakish and indeed burlesque. The suitor who cannot help lying is depicted in emphatically 'false' combinations of sound. Every point of married life described by Kotchkaref is imitated: the barking of the pet dog, the canary's song, the noisy children—"of whom", Kotchkaref says, "there will be not two or three, but a full six", whereupon the music echoes the prediction with two semiquavers, a triplet of semiquavers, and a sextuplet. However much we may admire, quite rightly, the extraordinary power of invention displayed, however much we appreciate single points in this highly skilful achievement, we must in justice grant that the work as a whole is one-sided, tendentious, and that artistically speaking this kind of achievement is fundamentally 'nonsense'. We have the right to conclude that he himself judged it quickly and soundly. He wrote one act and left it at that. He was most sensitive to inner falsity, which he would discover—even in the province of realism—where no one else would have suspected it. He wished art to be robust and full-blooded: but whenever he felt that excess in this direction risked throwing the live human soul and the live soul of art into the background, he was the first to turn away from it.

The facts stated are true: the music does allude to the barking dog, the singing bird, and the noisy children, and the forecast that these will be six in number runs:

Ex.13

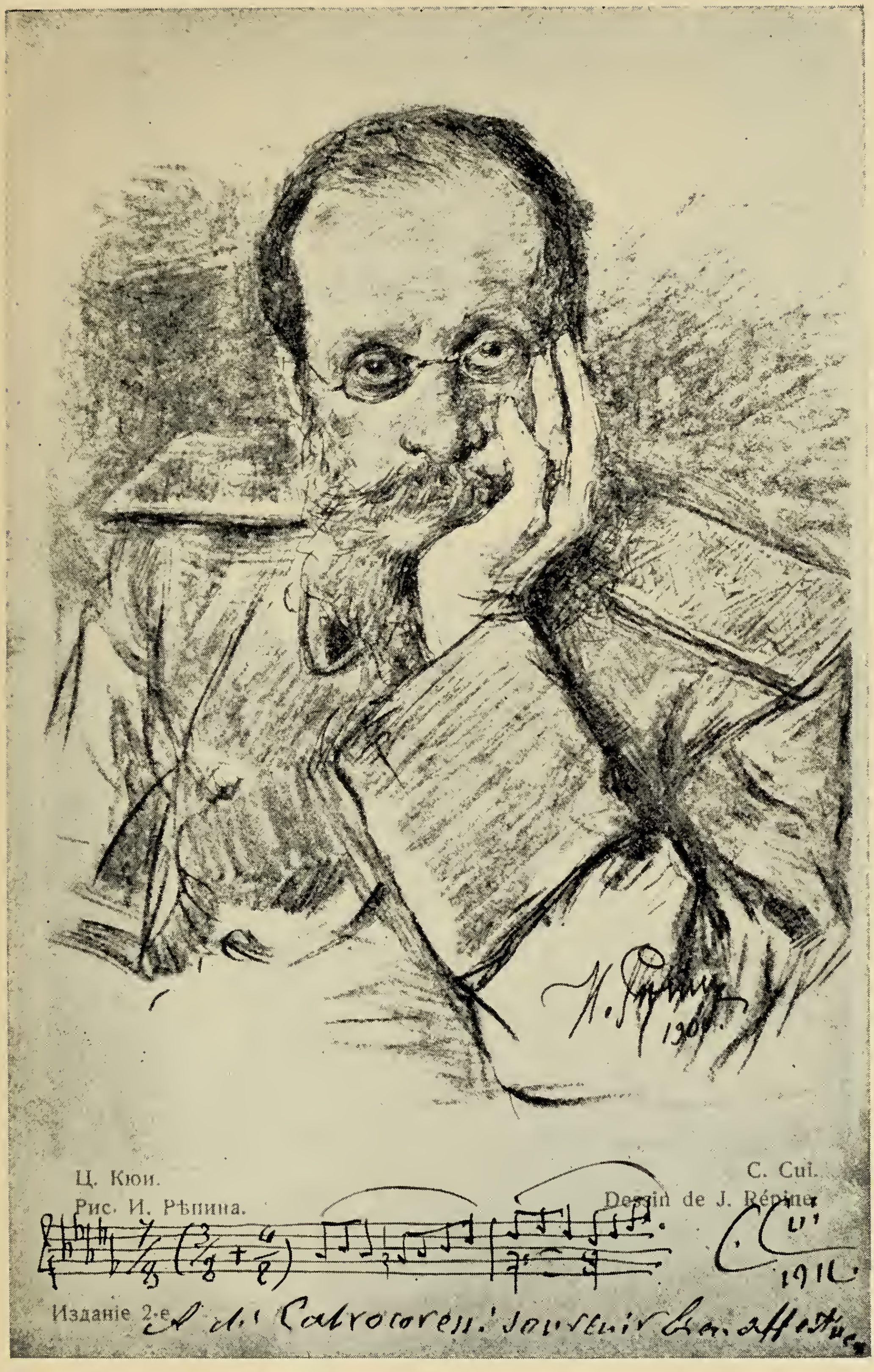


It is open to doubt whether anyone would notice the 'two, three, six' effect unless reading the score with the deliberate purpose of finding counts of indictment. Triplets in not very different arrangements are scattered throughout the score. The impression conveyed is not that of enumeration (as, for instance, the twelve strokes of the clock in Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*, Act ii, scene 1) but, at the end of bar one, that of preparation for an increase of emphasis, and at bar two, of an arabesque carried to its end in bar three. The passage would sound equally straightforward and appropriate if the words were: "I have said it not once, not twice, but over twenty times!" And even, granting that Mussorgsky introduced the 'two, three, six' arrangement as deliberately as the allusion to the dog, and the canary, let it not be forgotten that the work is a comedy after all; the whole score is there to show that he did not rely on such effects for his humour, nor need them for purposes of characterization. He took them in his stride, and expected, quite reasonably, listeners to do the same, and to show a sense of proportion.

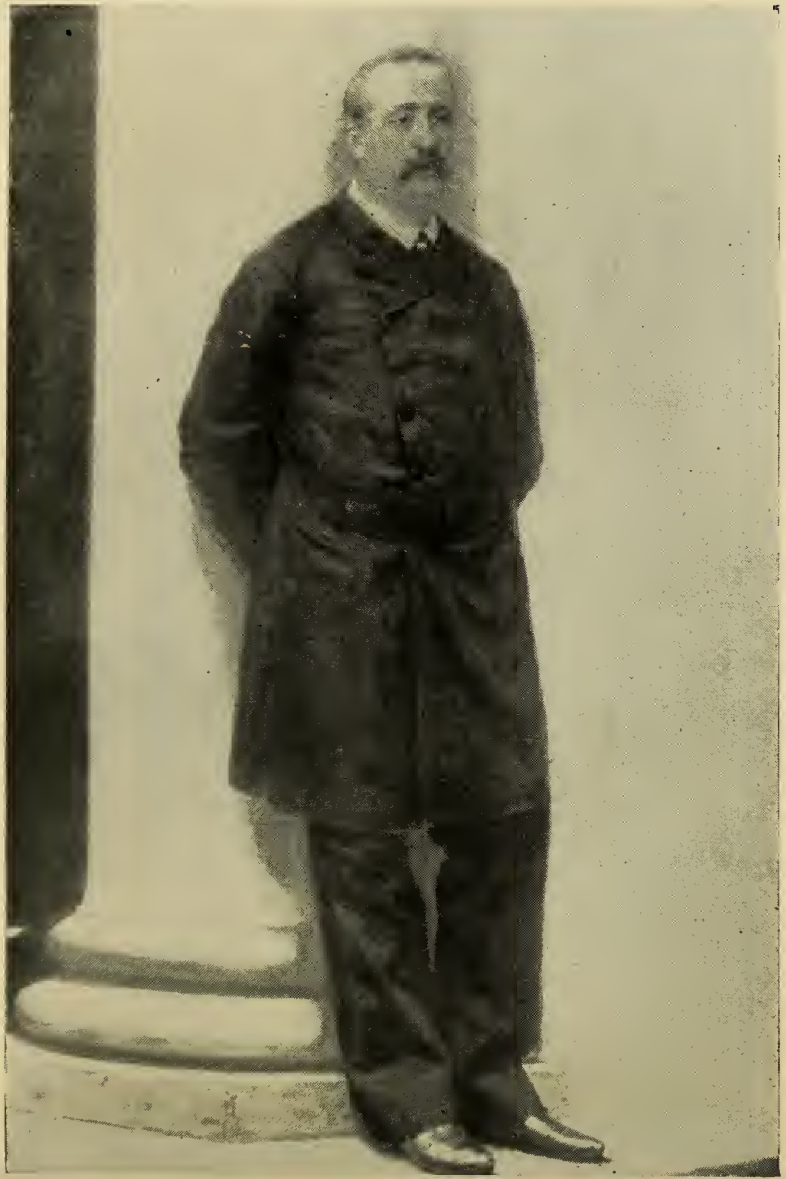
But the main reason for rejecting Karatyghin's hypothesis, and also Rimsky-Korsakof's (which is entirely a matter of opinion—and Rimsky-Korsakof's attitude to the music of Strauss, D'Indy, and Debussy undoubtedly helps to account for the line he took) is that at the beginning of 1873 Mussorgsky, presenting the manuscript of the first act to Vladimir Stassof, wrote to him:

> On the occasion of your name-day, always so dear to me, I am thinking of you all the time. And naturally the thought occurs to me, how am I to give pleasure to my dear friend? The reply is, without the slightest hesitation—for thus it goes with foolhardy people: "To make him a present of my very self". And this I proceed to do. Accept my early work on Gogol's *Marriage*. Examine this experiment in musical discourse, compare it with *Boris Godunof*, put 1868 and 1871 side by side, and you will see that what I give you is, irrevocably, my very self. I have added the part of Kotchkaref copied by Dargomyjsky, a precious token of what he was to us all: he wrote it down despite his cruel illness and the calls that *The Stone Guest* made upon his time. I dislike lying hidden, and am convinced that to connoisseurs *The Marriage* will reveal much as to my musical audacities. You know how great a store I set by it—learn now that it was suggested to me by Dargomyjsky (in earnest) and Cui (in jest). The dates and places are recorded, in perfect order. So take me, my dear friend, and do with me as you please.*

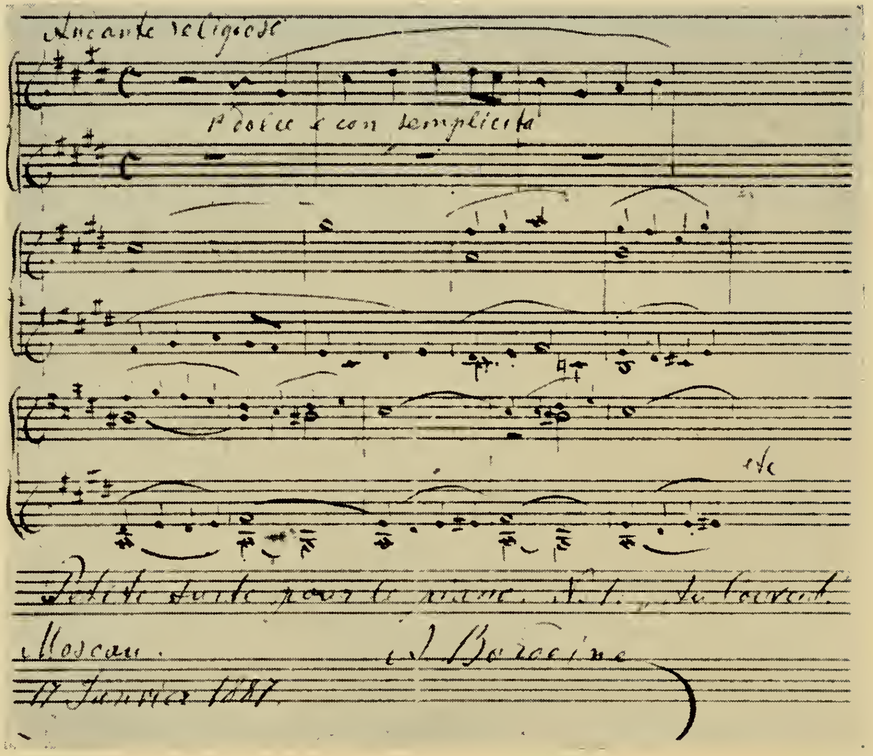
* 2/14 January, 1873.


Ц. Кюи.
Рис. И. Рѣпина.
C. Cui.
Dessin de J. Répine.
7/8 (3/8 + 4/8)
C. Cui
1911.
Изданіе 2-е
A M. Calvocoressi souvenir bien affectueux

César Cui



Borodin


Andante religioso
p dolce e con semplicità
etc
Petite Suite pour le piano. N. 1. Au Couvent.
Moscou.
A. Borodine
17 Janvier 1887.

Autograph copy of Borodin's piano piece, 'Au Couvent'

Mussorgsky would have been the last person in the world to describe as "his very self" a work that he had come to regard as a still-born experiment, or as standing in need of drastic emendation, or as tainted even with the faintest trace of "inner falsity"—especially after the experience gained when composing *Boris Godunof*.

To understand why he cast *The Marriage* aside, it suffices to remember his doubts as to the possibility of maintaining an equally high level throughout the remaining acts—a frame of mind which does not in the least suggest dissatisfaction with what he had done so far; and also, that in the autumn of 1868, Nikolsky, in a flash of inspiration, suggested to him the idea of composing *Boris Godunof*—a splendid inducement to "stop talking of getting ready, and carry something through at last", which drove everything else out of his mind.

From his one act, he derived no benefit whatever, moral or practical, except the experience gained. The members of his circle were the only people to get acquainted with it, and they soon forgot all about it. Maybe he hoped that a chance might come to submit it to a wider circle—a wistful hint to that effect may have lurked behind his words to Stassof: "I dislike lying hidden . . . do with me as you please". But this was not to be: nothing more was heard of *The Marriage* during his lifetime and for over a quarter of a century after.

Mussorgsky was thoroughly right in describing *The Marriage* as "irrevocably his very self". Although the music is utterly unrelated to Russian folk-music, most of the characteristic features of his mature style are present in it. It is as original in conception and in execution as it is telling and well suited to its special purposes. Its chief merits are admirably defined in an essay by the French composer Charles Koechlin (*Revue musicale*, April, 1923):

> Music that is genuinely and intrinsically comic is incredibly scarce, especially in works intended for the stage, in which the usual substitutes are mere caricature, parody, and a few more or less picturesque or sensational effects. To achieve the real thing calls for as much earnestness of purpose, conscientiousness, skill, and genius as the highest order of music-drama does—and for as subtle and deep psychological insight as is displayed by Molière and Shakespeare. Alone so far Mussorgsky, exploiting neither the absurd nor the excessive, but simply plain logical truth, has given us a complete, perfect example of genuine, pure comic music.

A moment's reflection will show how true the point is. Ninety-nine per cent. of the would-be comic effects in music are invitations to laugh rather than flights of comic fancy—musical equivalents, as Koechlin rightly puts it, of the style and manner of Molière's *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac* but not of his *Misanthrope.* Mussorgsky steers clear of all such facile and shallow devices. His style would have met the requirements of comedy of the highest order. Its scope is limited by that of the subject matter only. He uses no motley pigments, no magnifying glass, no distorting mirror. *The Marriage* is a perfect example of realism consisting in a minimum of stylization.

The character of the text compelled him to avoid stylizing not only his materials, but his arrangement of them, the structure of the score. To achieve continuity and consistency under such conditions was an arduous problem. As he himself put it, he had to face "particularly erratic harmonic conditions"; and equally erratic conditions in the matter of rhythm, he might have added. Formal tonal schemes and rhythmic periodicity would have stiffened the dialogue and retarded the pace. His solution betokens not only a strong sense of discrimination, but full command of the means he selected. As regards tonal balance, for instance, it will be noticed that although the harmonies are ever shifting, although there is no tonal centre of any duration, and hardly any two successive cadences point in a similar direction, never is a feeling of ambiguity or neutrality conveyed. The ground may be indefinable most of the time, but it remains firm underfoot.

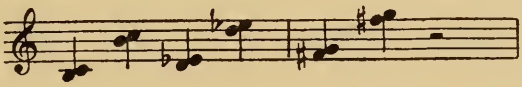
Considering that he was setting prose, it is extraordinary that he should have availed himself so little of the resources provided by changes of time-signature, which he had already turned to account in several of his songs. But this does not prevent the dialogue being of exemplary suppleness and point.

Harmony is the least salient feature. The texture is almost purely linear, chords intervening in order to bring out and reinforce the linear patterns rather than to provide explicit harmonic definition. Variety and intensity are obtained by means of contrasts of light and shade, pace, and dynamic accents. Colour proper plays hardly any part. The music, as written for the piano, may be said to consist entirely of black, white and grey; and no special orchestral effect or scheme of scoring is suggested. Nor are the particular sonorous properties of the piano exploited in any way. Neither the very low nor the very high registers are called into play. In all respects, the music is a model of economy and restraint.

Few recondite chords or concatenations are to be encountered. How secondary the harmonic scheme was in Mussorgsky's mind is shown by the fact that here, he, who elsewhere avoided stereotypes so carefully, resorts without a qualm to certain cut and dried formulas, such as sequences of diminished sevenths, using them either as transitions or for the sake of dramatic emphasis.

Another device—but one as novel at the time as diminished sevenths were hackneyed—is the use of seconds or clusters of seconds in order to secure dramatic emphasis:

Ex.14



Obviously, the function of these is to provide accentuation, not colour.

Since neither tonal relations nor rhythmic periodicity provided a suitable basis for the structure, Mussorgsky was bound to base his structural scheme on thematic continuity and inter-relations. This he did with remarkable lightness and surety of touch. *The Marriage* is the earliest example in Russian music of methodical use of leitmotives, but his way of handling them owes more to Liszt's principle of theme-transformation than to Wagner's method.

In *The Marriage* all the themes are characterizing themes, most of them associated with one particular person, their shape and rhythm being suggested by that person's demeanour and movements; and they are capable, in turn, of suggesting characteristic attitudes and gestures (apart from being expressive exactly in the same way as these attitudes and gestures may be). They are of the kind which may be called 'descriptive and pantomimic'.

Comparing the style of *The Marriage* with that of *The Stone Guest* we realize forthwith how very much more sensitive and supple than Dargomyjsky's is Mussorgsky's recitative. Dargomyjsky's is accurate in a dry, lifeless sort of way, as if the composer while at work had been thinking of speech generally rather than of individuals speaking, each according to his or her own nature (whereas in *The Marriage* the characters are strongly differentiated). It seems to consist not of recitative that has become melody, or melody that has become recitative, but mainly of dry recitative interspersed with snippets from the stock-in-trade of song or aria. It often is over-punctuated—an error into which Mussorgsky never falls. And the instrumental accompaniment, most of the time, contributes little that is significant.

This characterlessness is all the more astonishing considering that the characters in *The Stone Guest*, despite Pushkin's restrained procedure, have well-marked personalities, and indeed strong passions. Those in *The Marriage*, on the contrary, are puppet-like and shallow.

The experience gained by Mussorgsky through his work on *The Marriage* was the complement, and converse, of that which he had gained when composing *Salammbô*. In *Salammbô*, he had attempted, with limited success, to deal with the externals and the conventional forms of opera. With *The Marriage*, on the contrary, his field was restricted to essentials, and no question of externals arose. His problem was how to adjust the realistic minimum-of-stylization principle to the requirements of a musical play.

In September, he took up his abode in the home of his dear friends, Nadejda and Alexander Opotchinin, a flat in the Engineers' Palace (Alexander was the head of the Archives of the Engineering Department). A very happy period began for him. He started on *Boris Godunof* in October, devoting all his time to the task, and working at great speed. In November, the prospectus of the Russian Music Society concerts announced that excerpts from the opera would be given in the course of the season; and by the end of the year the first three scenes were finished in vocal score. Other minor encouraging events were, in the course of the year, the publication, by Johansen, of the songs 'The Banquet', 'Gathering Mushrooms', 'A Jewish Song', and 'The He-Goat', and his reinstatement in the service with the rank of assistant head-clerk in the Forestry Department.

Nadejda Rimsky-Korsakof and Varvara Komarova, Dimitri Stassof's daughter, recorded their impressions of Mussorgsky at that period and after. Here are Nadejda's recollections:

> I first met Mussorgsky at Dargomyjsky's home, at the time when Dargomyjsky was working at white heat on *The Stone Guest*, and we were preparing a private performance of scenes from it, my sister Alexandra learning the part of Laura and I being in charge of the piano. Dargomyjsky told us that the part of Don Carlos would be taken by Mussorgsky, the composer and singer, whose very name was

unknown to us. On the day of the rehearsal we met him for the first time. His personality was so original that once one had seen him, one could never forget him. He was of medium size, well built; he had beautiful hands, fine wavy hair, and light grey eyes, fairly large and slightly bulging. His features were very ugly, especially the nose, which was always red—the consequence, he explained, of frostbite on parade. His eyes were not expressive, and might be described as tinny. Nor was his face mobile; it usually wore a cryptic expression. When talking, he never raised his voice, but would rather keep it low; and as he spoke or listened, it seemed to me that he was perceiving witty and humorous points, and enjoying them within himself, half smiling at them.

He impressed us both greatly: and no wonder, considering how interesting, gifted, and enigmatic he was. We loved his singing. His baritone voice was not big, but pleasant and expressive. He sang simply, intelligently, with the subtlest shades of expression and with perfect naturalness. It was most fascinating to listen to him. Later I realized how wonderfully versatile an interpreter he was—equally excellent in dramatic, lyrical, and comical or humorous things; and as a pianist brilliant, powerful, elegant, masterly both in humour and in vehemence. He was inimitable in his readings of his own facetious songs, and deeply moving in the parts of Tsar Ivan the Terrible and Tsar Boris. He detested routine, not only in art but in everyday life down to the smallest details. He hated using simple words. He would show great ingenuity in altering and distorting family names. He chose his epithets aptly and subtly. The letters he wrote were most original and piquant. In the last years of his life, this originality of his became affectation, manifest not only in his letters but at times in his behaviour.

I remember his showing Dargomyjsky the first song in *The Nursery* and Dargomyjsky exclaiming: "Well! This beats anything I have done". When he heard the first two scenes of *Boris* he said: "Mussorgsky will go farther than me". When *The Marriage* was performed at our house, he took the part of Kotchkaref. He was delighted, and so convulsed with laughter that at times he had to stop singing. Then he would say to me [she was at the piano]: "Go on! Go on! Fill in, and give me time to have my laugh!"[4]

Komarova's recollections refer mainly to later years:

I remember him as I saw him when I was seven [in 1869]. He was a frequent visitor to both our town and our country homes, and immensely popular with us children. We called him Mussorianin, as the grown-ups did; and we believed this to be his actual name. He never patronized us or used baby talk to us, and this we appreciated. We regarded him as one of us. My sister Zinotchka and I were impressed by his practice of greeting us with a "How do you do, my lady?" and kissing our hand, just as if we were grown-up—which struck us as incredible and most amusing. But we chatted with him as with an equal; my brothers, too, were quite at ease with him and told him all about themselves and their doings. These conversations were the source of his songs 'Matros, the cat', 'The Hobby-Horse', and a third one (I cannot remember which) in the same set *The Nursery*. There was also another one, 'Dream', inspired by a story Zinotchka told him. It was never published, but I remember his singing it to us.

With me, the eldest, he often conversed on 'serious matters'. He it was who first told me about stars and constellations, teaching me to locate them; and also about the calendar. He often came to our country house and we were accustomed to his participating in all the events of our lives. I remember his being present one day when my two-year-old brother was given his bath in the sunlit porch and ran away all naked, crying, to be soothed by the promise of a strawberry. Mussorgsky, afterwards, delighted us by mimicking the whole scene and imitating my little brother yelling for the promised "belly, belly!"[3]

CHAPTER VIII

1869–1872

Work on Boris Godunof—*The first version—Its rejection —The second version—It is rejected too—Life with Rimsky-Korsakof*—Mlada—*Close friendship with Vladimir Stassof —First idea of* Khovanshchina

WE have very little information on Mussorgsky's life during the years 1869 and 1870. All through 1869, his time was fully occupied with *Boris Godunof* and his clerical duties; and whereas while composing *The Marriage* he had lavishly described his activities and frame of mind to his friends, it seems that he never wrote a single word to any of them while engaged on the initial version of *Boris*—at least, no trace exists of any letter of his written between August 1868 and May 1870, except for one brief note to Balakiref referring to matters in connection with a concert of the Free School of Music. So the repercussion that events around him may have had on him must remain a matter of conjecture.

On 5/17 January 1869, Dargomyjsky died, leaving *The Stone Guest* unfinished. Mussorgsky must have felt the loss deeply. Less than six weeks before, the performance of scenes from *The Stone Guest* at Dargomyjsky's home, referred to in Nadejda Rimsky-Korsakof's recollections (see *supra*, p. 112) had taken place, Mussorgsky singing the parts of Don Carlos and Leporello; Mussorgsky, in the course of the autumn, had also shown Dargomyjsky the first two scenes of *Boris Godunof*, and according to Stassof's testimony, Dargomyjsky had lavishly praised these, proclaiming that Mussorgsky had gone farther than he. Such a verdict, from the lips of "the great teacher of musical truth", was the most splendid encouragement Mussorgsky could have wished for. As for his opinion of *The Stone Guest*, it was expressed in a letter of 23 July 1870 to Rimsky-Korsakof (in the meantime, the work had been finished, in accordance with Dargomyjsky's expressed desire, by Cui and Rimsky-Korsakof, the former supplying the missing music and the latter undertaking the scoring of the whole):

So we shall soon hear *The Stone Guest* in your beautiful scoring, and have it stonily performed by our artists, Petrof alone excepted. Even so, I expect it to create a tremendous sensation: the fall of Babylon, the tower of Babel and the confusion of languages. Maybe it is as well that the confusion should occur at a time when Dargomyjsky has taken his place among our ancestors: for, despite his lofty artistic ideals and his wonderful energy and persistence, he remained, all told, a man of the 'forties. Seeing the public thrown into confusion by his *Guest* might have upset him, and even we, his friends, might have been unable to avert a new breakdown. He used to sour on the slightest provocation, and the ensuing fermentation was never of the kind that may serve a good purpose. But now he has been taken (in my opinion, all too soon), he stands where no dirt can reach him; in consequence, his music will fare all the better. Faith, boldness, and calm must be our motto. It should have been Dargomyjsky's too. He possessed, and he infused into art, something hitherto unsuspected, something that many people still consider impossible. So the thing to do is to fight one's way through.

The performance of *The Stone Guest* did not take place until 16/28 February 1872. Mussorgsky's hopes that it would create a great stir were not fulfilled. It was received coldly, and had but a short run.

To revert to 1869: on 14/26 February Cui's *Ratcliffe* was performed, and fell flat. In his letter to Cui of 15 August 1868, Mussorgsky had expressed his enthusiastic belief in the new work: "*Ratcliffe* is something more than a fine thing: it is the very first adequate example of type-portrayal in music. *À vous l'honneur, le charme à nous*!" It would be interesting to know whether the performance confirmed his first impressions. It seems doubtful that at a time when he was keyed up by his work on *Boris* and gaining daily increasing insight into the requirements and possibilities of dramatic music, he should have remained unaware of the feebleness of most of the music in *Ratcliffe*. It has been suggested by Russian critics that the hallucination scene in that opera may have been present in his mind while he was composing the hallucination scene in *Boris*; but the music does not provide any evidence to that effect. In fact, there was not the slightest musical affinity between Mussorgsky and Cui, nor any point of contact between their styles. Cui, nevertheless, had attempted "to embody in *Ratcliffe* the ideals of the groups" (Cui, *Recollections*[9]) and its production was "the first gun in their common fight for these; *The Stone Guest*, *The Maid of Pskof*, and *Boris Godunof* were produced later" (ib.). So loyalty to his friend Cui and to the cause of the new school would in any case have induced Mussorgsky to stretch a point in favour of *Ratcliffe.* A letter of 1873 to Stassof shows that he was not blind to the limitations of Cui's imagination and technique.

All through the winter and spring, the work on *Boris Godunof* proceeded apace. On 18/30 July, Stassof wrote to his brother Dimitri: "Mussorgsky has finally finished (*sic*) *Boris Godunof.* Towards the end of the last act, there is a narrative: Pimen describing how the Tsarevitch Dimitri appeared to him (*sic*), so beautiful that it stands on a par with Finn's ballad [in Glinka's *Ruslan and Liudmila*] and the finest things in his first two acts—that is, the scene of the people yelling and weeping under the cudgel, and the inn scene with the policemen."

This shows that Mussorgsky was not so busy but that he found time to show his work to a few chosen friends. Vladimir Stassof obviously did not approve of the whole of *Boris.* (In the course of the summer, he wrote to Balakiref, with reference to some other matter: "Really, you have become as obstinate as Mussorgsky with his *Boris* on the subject of which he refuses to listen to reason".) In all likelihood, he had offered advice calculated to ensure a good reception for *Boris*, and recommended certain concessions to the reigning taste, of the kind that Mussorgsky was eventually compelled to make. But Mussorgsky had refused to listen, passing on to the scoring all unmoved. This was completed by 16/28 December. The composer's troubles with his opera were soon to begin.

On 1/13 December 1869 Mussorgsky was promoted to the rank of collegiate assessor, a mere promotion in *tchin*, not implying advancement in the service. In 1872 he was made a junior chief clerk. Concerning his office work at that time and after, Andreï Rimsky-Korsakof says:[19]

> In the archives of the Ministry of Agriculture, there are twenty files containing all kinds of reports and other documents in Mussorgsky's hand, all written in the precise and restrained style of officialdom. They show that he had to work hard, and that the complaints in his letters to his friends were fully justified. Only towards the end of his years of service did he begin to fail in his duties—at least, so far as may be assumed from the fact that the official notice of his transfer to the Control Department bears the mention, from the pen of one of his superiors in the department he was leaving: "Delighted!"

In 1870, he was full of buoyancy despite the tediousness of his official duties. These, although miserably paid, had partially solved for him the problem of existence, further simplified by the fact that he was living with the Opotchinins. He had finished to his own satisfaction a tremendous piece of work, so profoundly original and pregnant that only nowadays is its full significance beginning to be realized; and this had won warm, if not altogether unqualified, approval from his friends. He was eager to tackle another of equal magnitude forthwith, but—as we know from a letter from Vladimir Stassof to his brother Dimitri[4]—unable to find a suitable libretto. A letter to Nikolsky of 19/31 May shows that he had borrowed several books of history, some of which referred to the Old Believers and the *Raskol* or schism. This suggests, as first pointed out by Andreï Rimsky-Korsakof in *Mussorgsky: Letters and Documents* (p. 156), that the notion of composing a national drama on this subject, which is that of *Khovanshchina*, may have begun to take shape in his mind at that very time.

The letter contains the following lines, on which Andreï Rimsky-Korsakof's remarks about "the precise and restrained style" of Mussorgsky's contributions to the office files provides an amusing comment: "The Forestry Department is going in for amending the Russian language, and turning out documents with forewords—many forewords—and what not. But I remain invulnerable, and insist upon showing some regard for euphony."

Then Stassof came forth with a plan for an opera to be entitled *Bobyl* (The Proletarian) after Spielhagen's* *Hans und Grete.*

Mussorgsky toyed with the idea a while, but gave it up after outlining the music for an incantation scene in it—music which he afterwards used for the incantation scene in *Khovanshchina*, and elsewhere in the same score. Then, all of a sudden, his thoughts turned towards composing 'The Peep-show', a lampoon on the Conservatoire, its staff, and its supporters. His dislike for that institution had been growing more and more acute. A postscript to his only letter of 1869 to Balakiref says, with reference to complimentary tickets for the season's concerts that the Conservatoire had sent him: "I have received tickets from the musical lair, and decided to return them to the said musical lair."

Probably the hostility of musical officialdom and of the Press to Balakiref (who in the spring of 1869, had been compelled to resign his post as conductor of the Russian Music Society concerts) had something to do with his anger. Having decided to deride the foes of new Russian music, he went for them tooth and nail.

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* Friedrich Spielhagen: a German novelist (1829-1911).

'The Peep-show', a long scene for baritone with piano accompaniment, begins with the Showman (Mussorgsky himself) announcing the show. Then are evoked, successively: Zaremba the then Director of the Conservatoire, proclaiming his mystic creed to music from Handel's *Samson*; the critic Fif (Theophilus) Tolstoï, "ever youthful, versatile, and conciliatory, ever dreaming of Patti, pa-pa-pa, pat-ti!" to the strains of a drawing-room waltz; Famyntsin, already caricatured in 'The Classicist' to music based on one of his own compositions; Serof, fulminating and airing his grievances, as he was wont to do, to music parodied from his *Rogneda*, and finally, to music in which a Russian folk-song is used, the Muse Euterpe—that is, the Grand Duchess Elena Pavlovna, the president of the Russian Music Society, whom all implore to shine upon them and shed gold upon them, whereupon they will sing.

The work, which in its time delighted the group, and has since won a good deal of praise as an example of Mussorgsky's gift for satire, is quite amusing really; but the musical effects in it are all of a very facile order. As a pamphlet music, as a weapon in the war between the two camps, it had a temporary value, no doubt. Nothing further can be said in its favour. In 1874, Mussorgsky (upon Stassof's suggestion), started composing another work of the same kind, named 'The Mound of Nettles'. Its subject was: the crayfish (Laroche, the critic) calls a meeting of all the beasts, to be held on this mound, in order to discuss the disastrous condition of musical affairs. He arraigns the cockerel (Mussorgsky) for his ceaseless, senseless crowing. All the other beasts, such as the bear, the sloth, the sheep, the sea-cow, and the bug—every one of them representing one of the enemies of the new school—approve; they agree to follow the crayfish's lead, and to wring the cockerel's neck. When Stassof acquainted Rimsky-Korsakof with the scheme, Rimsky-Korsakof replied:

> I thoroughly disagree with the notion. I have come to the conclusion that things such as 'The Peep-show' are ephemeral and appeal but to a very small circle. They call for explanations and comments, and especially for acquaintanceship with the persons caricatured. If not warned, listeners might well take, for instance, the "Pa-pa-pa-pat-ti!" waltz for the genuine article, and heartily enjoy it. Moreover, such

things must be done briskly and lightly. The capital, massive 'Peep-show' was not: nor would, I fear, 'The Mound of Nettles' be.

Rimsky-Korsakof was thoroughly right: 'The Peep-show' lacks the lightness and crispness of 'The Classicist', and also its universal significance. It depicts not types, but individuals, and depicts them in a way that cannot seem relevant until circumstantial explanations are provided. Yet in 1872 Rimsky-Korsakof suggested to Mussorgsky that he should caricature, in a friendly spirit this time, the members of the 'mighty handful'. Mussorgsky, in a letter to Stassof, declared himself delighted with the suggestion; but he never attempted to carry it out. The 'Mound of Nettles' idea appealed to him more strongly. He wrote to Stassof, at the time: "The idea of the cockerel being anathematized is amusing. It can be done, and perhaps be done quickly. But what an extraordinary person you are—what a bruiser!"* He outlined part of the music, and then dropped the scheme.

On 10/22 February 1871 the news came that the committee of the Marinsky Theatre had rejected *Boris Godunof*. Shortly afterwards, Mussorgsky, yielding to advice, decided to remodel it in order to render it more acceptable. He composed nothing else that year, except, in March, a 'Little Evening Song'. His eagerness to get on with *Boris* is expressed in his letters to Stassof. Yet it took him about a year and a half—until June 1872—to compose the new scenes and carry out the alterations he had decided upon: whereas the whole first version had been completed in thirteen or fourteen months.

On 23 October/4 November 1871, a private reading of Rimsky-Korsakof's *Maid of Pskof* took place at the house of the Purgolds, Mussorgsky taking the parts of Ivan the Terrible, Prince Tokmakof, and sundry minor characters, singing all these parts set for dissimilar voices, most beautifully, Rimsky-Korsakof records. Rimsky-Korsakof was to have difficulties with this opera, the Censor insisting that all expressions referring to the democratic regime of the old Pskof republic be altered, and also abiding by an edict of Tsar Nicholas I to the effect that tsars, provided they did not belong to the Romanof dynasty, might be represented in tragedy or drama, but no tsar, however ancient, in opera: "Can one imagine", the Censor explained, "a tsar being shown singing little songs on the stage?" With the help of the Minister of Marine (the composer's official chief) and also that of the Grand-Duke Constantine Nikolaevitch, the difficulties were overcome, and the opera successfully performed on 1/13 January 1873. The event showed the expediency of the notion of toning *Boris Godunof* down, by suppressing some of the portions of it to which the Censor was most likely to object.

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* Stassof, before filing the letter, blue-pencilled the word 'bruiser'—probably thinking of eventual publication.

Nine of Mussorgsky's songs, most of them composed years before, were published in 1871; and in the autumn he and Rimsky-Korsakof, wishing to be in closer artistic contact with one another, decided to share a room. In this room there were one writing-table and a piano. "We arranged", Rimsky-Korsakof says,[15] "that he should have the use of the piano until noon, while I sat working at the table. Then he would go to his office, leaving the piano free for me. As regards the evenings, we made arrangements according to circumstances." Stassof, in 1905, recorded his memories of the period as follows: "I shall never forget that time. I used to call on them early in the morning, rouse them, and help them to dress. Then we had breakfast, and immediately afterwards turned to our chief and favourite occupation, music. How jolly it all was, and how far back it is!" Borodin's opinion was that living in common had a beneficial effect on both composers: "Both have considerably improved since they started sharing a room. They are diametrically opposite as regards musical gifts and methods; and, so to speak, they complete one another. They react upon one another to the benefit of both. Modest has improved Korsinka's recitative and treatment of musical discourse generally, and Korsinka has done away with Modest's tendency to involved, wilful originality, to harsh harmonies, far-fetched, affected scoring, and illogical forms—in short made his compositions far more musical."

Early in the year, two excerpts from *Boris Godunof* were given in public: the 'Coronation' on 5/17 February at a concert of the Russian Music Society, Napravnik conducting; and the Polonaise on 5/17 April at the Free School of Music, Balakiref conducting.

"I suggested to him", Balakiref wrote years later to Stassof, "a few alterations. I see from the printed vocal score that he carried some of these out. I do not know if his scoring was amended, for I attended none of the stage performances [in 1874 and after]. I had nothing to do with the rest of *Boris*, nor with *Khovanshchina* and *The Sorotchintsi Fair*."

As already mentioned in chapter V, Balakiref disapproved of *Boris*. Yet Mussorgsky was grateful to him for performing the Polonaise: "You are rendering me a great service", he wrote on 22 March/4 April. "It is indispensable that I should hear some composition of mine for orchestra without chorus: it will be the very first opportunity for me to do so"—which was quite true, except for the performance in 1860 of the youthful Scherzo in B flat major, scored, it will be remembered, with Balakiref's help.

By June, the new version was ready in full score and Mussorgsky started planning to submit it to the arbiters of its fate. But, before he had finished it, a commission had been sprung upon him by no less a personage than Gedeonof, the director of the Imperial Theatres, and therefore the principal of these arbiters, which instead of delighting him, annoyed him. Gedeonof's idea was to commission four composers, Cui, Borodin, Mussorgsky and Rimsky-Korsakof, to set to music the libretto of a fantastic opera-ballet of his own devising, one act being allotted to each of them. The second and third acts were given to Mussorgsky and Rimsky-Korsakof jointly, and they divided the work between them. Vladimir Stassof had been entrusted with the task of carrying out the negotiations. What happened to arouse Mussorgsky's anger is not known. But the letter that he wrote to Stassof on 31 March shows that he had taken his grievances very much to heart:

> That *Mlada*! I feel hot with shame at the idea of putting pen to paper in order to set to music those "Sagana! Tchuk!" [meaningless words used to represent the language of the evil spirits, as in Berlioz's *Damnation de Faust* the "Has! Has! Irimiru Karabrao! etc."] and other balderdash, probably perpetrated at some time or other by some drunkard or other in a frenzy of delirium tremens. There's a fine source of inspiration for you! And fancy treating the composers of *Mlada* like so many hirelings, showing so little appreciation of their work! All this spells a moral fiasco for our circle. I can see it coming. You know, my dear friend, that I will not put up with indignities nor connive at them. So, I am taking action. I have explained, as sweetly and tactfully as possible, to Korsinka and Borodin that in order to safeguard the virgin purity of our circle, and not let it be turned into a woman of the streets, I intend to give, not to accept, orders, as to how we shall do our work. With their agreement, I shall speak for all three of us.

Rimsky-Korsakof, too, was not too well pleased with the position. But neither he nor Mussorgsky was wishful to stand in the way of a scheme in which Cui and Borodin were interested: so they allowed things to run their course. Soon afterwards, the scheme fell through, for the reason that the production would have proved inordinately costly owing to the required settings and machinery.

That the libretto was not so hopelessly unsatisfactory as it appeared to Mussorgsky is shown by the fact that later Rimsky-Korsakof set it to music, making a splendid job of it. But as it provided a framework for picturesque, descriptive music rather than opportunities for human music, it was not of a kind that could be expected to appeal to Mussorgsky's imagination in 1872.

The music he composed comprised a market scene and a march of the princes and priests for Act ii, and a remodelling of his *Night on the Bare Mountain*—a version for chorus and orchestra—for a glorification of Tchernobog in Act iii. This choral version, of which nothing remains, was again remodelled for inclusion in *The Sorotchintsi Fair*; so, for the same purpose, was the market scene. The march was turned in 1880 into a 'March to celebrate the taking of Kars', a new trio in Eastern style being added to it.

In the course of the spring Mussorgsky had decided, following upon long conversations with Stassof, that the subject of his next opera would be *Khovanshchina*, the history of the conflict, towards the end of the seventeenth century, between the old Russia and the new—old feudal Russia being represented by the princes Khovansky, and old mystic Russia by the schismatic Old Believers, whose leader was the monk Dosifei. He set to work with great enthusiasm, studying his materials and outlining the libretto. But, mingled with the buoyancy which the new plan induced in him, there was a feeling of disenchantment, the reason for which he gave in a letter of 11 July to Liudmila Shestakova:

> Five years ago, you achieved your gracious plan of making your home a centre of reunion for our little group. You witnessed our doings, our enthusiasm and the battles we fought; it all found a live echo in your heart. Many fine things were achieved, and for this we owe you tribute. Glorious was the past of the group, gloomy is its present. Evil days have come. I shall not regard any of its members as responsible, but in this connection I cannot help remembering, in all good humour, Griboiedof's "some of them were routed, and the others are dead, you see" [from the play, *The Misfortune of being Intelligent*]. A great pity! However hard I try to drive all thought of it away, the distressing memory haunts me, like a gadfly whose buzzing sounds like spiteful,

derisive laughter. It is for you, dear friend, to collect the remnants of the scattered army: and if victory is impossible, let it at least be a fight to the last drop of blood, literally. Fighters will come forth and hold their standards firm against all comers. They will assemble: in rags, maybe, but their rags will be their own, not borrowed ones. The artist has faith in the future, because he lives in the future. So, faith has impelled me to lay my offering at your feet and confess to you. Take my *Boris* under your wing, and may the work be privileged to start its public career with your blessing!

Two days later he wrote a remarkable letter to Stassof, referring to his preliminary work on *Khovanshchina*, and then branching off to expatiate at length upon art and technique.

Can you explain why, when I listen to young artists—painters or sculptors for instance—I am able to follow the workings of their minds, and to understand their ideals, and I seldom hear a word about technique unless it becomes imperative to broach the subject: whereas (but don't try to explain!) when I listen to our musical brothers, I seldom hear a live thought expressed—it is nearly always mere school-desk talk, about technique and musical terms. Is musical art so immature for the reason that it is practised by fledglings? How often, just by chance, and in accordance with our silly custom, have I not started talking with a colleague, only to find out that owing either to mutual repulsion or to lack of clarity, we did not understand one another!

Well, maybe, I have no capacity for clear exposition—for presenting, so to speak, my brains on a salver, with the ideas printed on them as on a telegraph slip. But what about them? Why can't they make a start? Don't they wish to, then? Well, you, my dear *Generalissimo*, do understand me, and your bold, confident hand always hits the nail on the head. Granting that I shun technique, does this mean I am a poor technician? A time will come when somebody will take up the cudgels in my defence on this point. What I can say is that I can't stand a host's telling me, while I am enjoying a good pie: "a million *poods* of butter, five hundred eggs, a whole row of cabbages, and of fish a hundred and fifty and a quarter". You eat the pie and enjoy it: well and good. But should you go into the kitchen, you will see the invariably dirty cook, chickens on one shelf, pieces of fish on another, or maybe on the same, entrails peeping out of the colander (Prussians would appreciate the show!), and often a filthy rag with which the edges of the pie-dish will be wiped before serving. And then you will not find the pie so enjoyable. I tell you, so long as composers do not discard their swaddling-clothes, the symphony pontiffs will reign, imposing their Talmud upon us as the *alpha* and *omega* of art. Meanwhile, wise people feel that live art has nothing to do with that Talmud of theirs. I have no quarrel with the symphony; only with the symphonists, with the hopeless conservatoires. So you need not tell me why our musicians are more concerned with technique than with historical duties and goals. Another thing: I cannot help wondering why, whereas Antokolsky's, Repin's, and Perof's works are generally accepted and understood, the newest achievements in music, despite their excellence, are not; and people, after having listened, come to you, saying: "Oh, yes: I thought that you . . . etc." Explain this to me, I pray: but without referring to the boundaries of art, my belief in which is only relative. Boundaries in the artist's creed spell stagnation. Besides, where are the boundaries? It is true that up to a point, there *are* boundaries of a kind: sounds cannot do the work of paintbrush or chisel—all best things have their weakness, and conversely, as every child knows. I have taken up my cross and shall march, head raised, boldly and joyfully, against all opponents, towards the grand, the true, the luminous goal, towards the true art that loves humanity, living all its joys, pains, and labours. I do not ask for your helping hand: you have extended it long ago, and ever since I have clung to it. It is my best and beloved support.

On 18/30 October, came another profession of faith:

I am reading Darwin, and feel enraptured. It is not the greatness of his mind, nor its clarity, that transports me—I have been aware of these qualities from the time I first read his works: it is the fact that studying humanity from the point of view of its origins, he well knows the kind of animals he has to deal with. So he is able to grip one as in a vice; and so gigantic is his genius, that instead of resenting the violation one feels enraptured. When a strong, ardent, well-loved woman holds her lover tight in her arms, even if she is being coerced, she does not wish to escape from the embrace, for sweetness has come out of violence. I am not ashamed of using this simile: whoever has known love in all its strength and boundlessness has *lived*, and remembers that he has lived splendidly. . . . In poetry, there are two giants: the crude Homer and the subtle Shakespeare. In music, two: the meditator Beethoven, and the ultra-meditator Berlioz. Add to these four the generals and adjutants under them, and you have a goodly legion. But what do the adjutants achieve? Nothing beyond bounding and dancing about along the road built by the giants, without ever advancing too far ahead—too frightening for them! And our own ones? Glinka, Dargomyjsky, Pushkin, Lermontof, Gogol and Gogol and again Gogol—they are one and all great generals, they have led their armies to the conquest of beautiful lands. Now, their successors are busy manuring these lands, which are too fertile to require manuring.

Darwin has finally confirmed me in my innermost idea (about which at one time, I felt rather foolishly shy) that the artistic representation of beauty only, in the material sense, is crude puerility, an infantile stage of art. The subtlest traits of human nature, as manifest in individuals and in the masses, the exploration and conquest of those little known regions—that is the artist's real mission. "To new shores!" Man is a social animal and cannot be otherwise. In masses, as in individuals, there always are subtle, elusive traits which no one has touched upon. To observe and study these by reading, watching, and conjecturing, with all possible intensity, and feed it to humanity as a health-giving pabulum, yet untried—therein lies the duty and the joy of joys. We shall endeavour to do so in our *Khovanshchina*, shall we not, my dear soothsayer?

This important letter should be considered jointly with one which he had written to Stassof on 22 June/4 July:

At times one feels one has to blazon one's thoughts. That time has come for me: I am pregnant, and you shall see what I am about to bring into the world. How would it be if Mussorianin was to take Mother Russia by storm? Her rich black soil has often been tilled. I want to till not already cultivated land but virgin soil: not to scrape acquaintance with the people, but to identify myself with them—terrible, but fine! The full strength of Russia's black earth will not manifest itself until the soil is ploughed to the utmost depth. It can be worked with tools of foreign origin, as was done at the end of the seventeenth century [a reference to Peter the Great's policy]: but to do so is all wrong. Now times have changed, but still our sore-tried soil is allowed no respite. My duty is: the past living in the present. But, it will be alleged, we have progressed. Not in the least: we are at a standstill, and shall remain at a standstill so long as the people are unable to see with their own eyes how they are misrepresented, and so long as they have no say in the matter, no will to protest. Books are written, documents drawn, but the people suffer and groan; they seek relief in drink, and suffer and groan all the more.

You are dear to me, not because I need you, but because you expect a lot of me; and I expect a lot of myself, so wistfully, so passionately! But I love you because of your capacity to shake up our Russian marmots, who sleep at the wrong moment and stir at the wrong moment. Nobody sees better than you do where my dream leads me, what I am delving for; nobody anticipates so clearly my further course (and a long course it will be: I have barely come out into the open). And so, no one but me realizes your power, and I realize it in my innermost heart.

The tone of these letters is very different from that of the earlier ones. A strange note of mystic confidence has crept into Mussorgsky's utterances. Not a trace of the doubts or "foolish shyness" of 1867–8 remains. He feels sure not only of his goal, but of his ground. At the same time, his attitude has become more or less that of a visionary; and from that time on he will incline to talk more and more of what he hopes to do, living in the future and in a dream of realities to come.

Particular value attaches to the expression of his active love for the people, and to the indications he gives of his political creed. He is seen burning with the desire to serve the people by means of his art, by arousing sympathy for them and interest in them, and above all by promoting a fuller comprehension of them and all that concerned them—the only possible way for him, considering both the conditions of the time and his own nature.

He also reveals what he expected to achieve in *Khovanshchina*, the new work with which he already is "pregnant" in June. The full story of it will be told in chapters XIII and XIV; and it will appear from his later letters that he hoped to go much further than in *Boris*, to delve deeper into the soul and spirit of the people. Here, he was writing under the impression of his studies of the period he was preparing to deal with. The enthusiasm this preliminary work aroused in him shows in every line of another letter (15/27 July):

> To Vladimir Vassilievitch Stassof, as I dedicate *Khovanshchina* to him.
>
> I do not and need not care that no instance exists of a work being dedicated before it comes into being. No qualm turns me aside. I wish to look ahead, not backwards. I dedicate to you that whole period of my life during which I shall be composing *Khovanshchina*. There is nothing ridiculous in my saying: "I dedicate to you my own self and my life during that period": for I have a live remembrance of living *Boris* and in *Boris*, and that time will ever be dear to me. Now begins to seethe a new work, which belongs to you, and I am beginning to live in it: what a wealth of new impressions, how many new lands await discovery—wonderful! So I implore you to accept my unworthy self in this dedication of *Khovanshchina* which you have called into existence.

In the course of the autumn, he met Tchaikovsky, who was on a visit to Petersburg, several times. He wrote to Stassof this highly amusing account of the meetings:

> I have been in touch with the worshippers of pure musical beauty, and their conversations left me with a strange feeling of emptiness,

coupled with another, still stranger and more irksome, which I cannot describe—the kind of feeling one experiences when one has lost a very dear friend whose companionship meant much to one. One remembers happy hours, one wishes to live them again, and one finds oneself in a dark, lonely forest, with unintelligible noises arising now and again—the inhumanity and lifelessness of it all becomes frightening.

I had my first experience of the kind on Sunday, at Cui's. We did not have *Opritchnik* [Tchaikovsky's opera], because the composer had not brought the score. But we had:
'Tisbe' (from Cui's *Angelo*)—fiasco.
Mlada (Cui's share)—a success, except for the Morena music, a fiasco; the trio, furore.
The Nursery—the type and purpose of the music were disapproved of, but it was said that the composer's reading imparted to it a meretricious attractiveness: otherwise, trash.
'The Vagabonds' [from *Boris*]—fiasco.
'The Parrot' [from *Boris*]—furore.

Sadyk-Pasha [Mussorgsky's nickname for Tchaikovsky] was half asleep, dreaming of sorbets, or maybe of his Moscow kneading-trough especially when the *Boris* excerpts came. For then the dough began to rise. After 'The Parrot', bubbles started bursting with an ugly muffled noise; amid which I discerned the words: "Has power . . . but wastes it . . . useful to work at . . . a symphony (in regular form, of course)". The powerful one thanked Sadyk-Pasha duly. I met him again at Bessel's. I was asked to play *Boris*, and he asked for 'The Parrot' and effervesced furiously. But he set his face against the 'Polonaise'.

CHAPTER IX

1873

*Mussorgsky falls a prey to dipsomania—His friends' concern and efforts—He recovers—*Boris *accepted for performance*

THE year 1873 was an all-important one in Mussorgsky's career, for in the course of it performance and publication of *Boris Godunof* were secured at last, but it was marked by a disastrous happening: his succumbing to the craving for alcohol.

Is there not in the excitable, unrestrained tone of some of the letters just quoted an indication that in the summer of 1872 he was beginning to lose his grip upon himself, and already indulging in drink? It is difficult to say. All the evidence we have of his having gone downhill refers to the spring and summer of 1873; but Repin's Recollections, which will presently be quoted, seem to indicate that by that time intemperance had become habitual to him, and that Stassof had already made many an effort to curb him. Even so, there is nothing in his letters of 1873 to betray deterioration, even temporary. The actual facts came to light only a few years ago.

The sad story begins with a letter of 6/18 June, from Dimitri Stassof to his wife, which says: " Mussorgsky himself told Volodia that he had been tormented by symptoms of insanity, and that the same thing had been occurring a few years ago. And also, he goes repeating that he is drinking heavily, although not fond of drinking. How terrible it is!" The next day he wrote to her: "Mussorgsky came to supper last night. I found him greatly changed—slack, thin, taciturn. But he keeps on composing as before—splendidly." Vladimir Stassof, at the time, was in Western Europe.

> During his stay in Paris, he would have been perfectly happy but for the distressing thought of what might be happening the while to his beloved Mussorianin. Many a time already, returning from a journey abroad, he had had to come to the rescue of the great artist, who during his absence had sunk to the utmost depth. It is incredible how so well-bred, well-educated a man, a quondam officer of the Guards, gentle, courteous, attractive, witty, irrepressibly cheerful, would, as

soon as Stassof was not there, lose his hold upon himself, sell his furniture and good clothes, and go haunting cheap taverns, where he sank to the level of the 'has beens' around him, indistinguishable from them, his childlike, chubby person with the snub red nose quite unrecognizable. How many a time Stassof, after a long search, discovered him at last in some basement room, in rags, stupefied with drink. Even while abroad Stassof used to bombard all his friends with letters, asking for tidings: but none came to him, for nobody knew what had become of Mussorgsky.*

The evidence is overwhelming. Very few particulars of his intemperance in 1873 and after had leaked out before the publication (1909) of Rimsky-Korsakof's Memoirs. And Rimsky-Korsakof has been accused in certain quarters—notably by Godet, whom eagerness to champion Mussorgsky led to disregard the rules of elementary fairness and courtesy—of incomprehension, and even misrepresentation. It has already been mentioned here that Rimsky-Korsakof's attitude to his colleagues in his Memoirs was not entirely above reproach, but on this point it would be absurd to deny him full credence: since then, a mass of confirmatory evidence has cropped up, emanating from other excellent friends of Mussorgsky, whom nobody could suspect of exaggeration, censoriousness, or self-righteousness—Liudmila Shestakova among others.

Nothing could show more clearly the deep affection these people bore to Mussorgsky, their goodwill and understanding, and their eagerness to help him than the moving letter which Pauline Stassof wrote to him immediately after hearing the distressing news:

My dear, my very dear Mussorianin, what have I heard! My husband writes that he found you grown thinner, very much changed, not at all Pargolovo-like—nor even Mussorianin-like. What does it all mean? I beseech you, not in the name of a woman who is dear to you (for there are interests loftier than those of the heart), but in the name of that Russian art you love so well, and of art generally which you serve, do keep yourself in hand. What is the trouble? Is it your office work that worries you? But think that you will get promotion, rewards, find favour with your chiefs or other powers that be. Don't waste yourself, don't grow too angry: even if you have to stick to your job for ten years, it will mean no loss to you, and to Russian music a great gain, since you will remain strong and healthy to serve her. Your difficulties harass

* Repin: *Recollections*—unpublished but quoted elsewhere.[4]

you: well, is there any distinguished person who always finds things easy? You have financial troubles: but what are friends for? Merely to hear, admire, or tear to pieces your music? I need not expatiate on my feelings for you; you know them well enough. Maybe the trouble originates in some physiological cause. Do away, then, with the cause of the evil: what are doctors for? let us speak frankly, bluntly, as is fitting. That naughty head of yours . . . well, is it not affected now and then by the means to which you resort because your gullet, too, is naughty? Why not consult, instead, Rauchfus or some other first-rate specialist, who will cure you? Dear, beloved Mussorianin, think well: the man who started with *Boris* must rise ever so much higher. Are you really going to shorten your life as Glinka (but not by the same means) shortened his? Listen: when I return to Petersburg, in September, and I am rid of all my whimsies, I want to enjoy your company on Saturdays and Sundays at Pargolovo as before, and hear your music. And of course, I am not the only one who longs to hear new things of yours. Be a dear: no illness, no running to waste!

Good-bye, dear friend. Do not resent this letter. Long ago George Sand said: "Il n'y a pas de despotisme plus grand que celui de l'amitié". I have now demonstrated the truth of this saying, but my despotism may be justified by the feeling that inspired it. I shake both your hands warmly, warmly. The Tiapas and Mishenkas [the children and dolls, as in Mussorgsky's *Nursery*] all send their greetings to their beloved Mussorianin.

Mussorgsky replied, on 23 July:

My very sweet, beloved lady I shudder when I think how greatly my protracted silence must have perplexed you. Whatever reply I may deserve, I am not so graceless but that I can give you a heartfelt answer. Stingy husbandmen generally put their cat in a room where it will find no mice because the provisions stored there have gone too bad to attract them. So the cat must either escape or starve to death.

When I read your sweet letter, I felt like such a cat, who had escaped, finding fresh air and good food. But on one point you are wrong: you need not fear for the musician in me. What a mistake for such a clever dear as you to make! Even should there be a slight doubt as to the work I am turning out being able to stand on its legs, there is none that I am often at work. If the results are not set down on paper, it is because the time has not yet come. The fault lies with this country of ours, which produces herbs of whose existence she is unaware, because she has no need for them. In Russia, art is a natural growth, but the fine arts are a mere luxury. I don't mean music only: I love (and understand, I think) all the arts. So far, my lucky star has guided me:

> that it will guide me further I steadfastly believe, because I love and live with so great a love, loving both humanity and art.

And, after giving particulars of his plans for *Khovanshchina* and of the portions that were "practically ready":

> There, my very dear, sweet lady, is my answer to your more than friendly letter from Salzburg. My very warmest thanks. Now I am living in *Khovanshchina* as I lived in *Boris*. I am the same Mussorianin, only stricter for myself after that first success, which was crowned by you, and in consequence of my efforts to get close to the people; and I want to create a drama of the people—there!
>
> Your dear husband will perhaps be pleased with the early news of *Khovanshchina*. Liszt was so delighted with my *Nursery* that he wishes to inscribe a small piece to me. The subject and text were explained to him by Baroness Meyendorf, who is staying with him at Weimar.

Bessel, the publisher, visiting Liszt in the spring, had shown him many Russian works, and Liszt had been particularly struck with Mussorgsky's. Mussorgsky, when he heard the news, was delighted, not only for his own sake—"and yet, what will Liszt think when he sees the vocal score of *Boris Godunof*!"—but for that of the new Russian music generally, "which had found a champion in such an ace as Liszt" (letter to Stassof, 22 July); and Stassof, who meanwhile had received from Bessel the tidings, invited Mussorgsky to join him in Germany, after which they would jointly proceed to Weimar for Mussorgsky to meet Liszt. Mussorgsky refused, giving the following reasons:

> Alas, that I should have to turn away from sacred, most vital life, in order to sweat over rubbish! But thus it is. Your flaming call impelled me to cast off my official uniform, but the trouble is that I cannot let my comrade and chief down: he is suffering from eye-trouble, and it would be wrong. He has been helpful to me, and now I must stand by him.
>
> A meeting with Liszt! How many fine things might have been the outcome! But no, another way must be found of earning my daily bread, according to my strength and aptitudes. Besides I have faith in my star. It is impossible that an opportunity should not come, sooner or later, to see the men of Europe. If not, well, I shall resign myself. Your invitation, as splendid as you yourself are—that I should go with you to see Liszt, all expenses arranged for by you—is wrecked and there is nothing to be done. Nothing remains but one wonderful, life-giving impression—so live that I feel I am seeing Liszt, hearing his voice,

talking to him and to you. This is no dream, no empty, wild talk. All the vitality that remains in me goes to evoking within me the image of the great artist Liszt and of his achievements. But for you, maybe, I should never have come so close to him, nor scrutinized him so intently. And it is the scrutinizing that is the main thing. There you are, dear friend. Call it all a platonic affair, but the main point is that my brain has been roused. This, you know, is always the main thing for a Russian: Russians are like the Petersburg cabbies, who never enjoy a nap better than when they are driving a passenger. I do not ask you to refrain from reminding me that I failed to go to Liszt. On the contrary, I ask you to remind me again and again: sometimes, a hateful feeling does one good, and disgust may help one to work one's salvation. I am now swimming the *Khovanshchina* waters, dawn is breaking, I am beginning to see my way and even to outline sketches—that's not bad.

Long particulars of the work on *Khovanshchina* followed.

Stassof, who saw in that visit to Liszt a chance of salvation for his friend, was naturally not satisfied with these lame excuses, and wrote another pressing, circumstantial letter, imploring Mussorgsky to come, even if it meant his having to resign from the service. But the only reply was: *IMPOSSIBLE*; *Khovanshchina* was begun, *Khovanshchina* was seething. And to convince his friend Mussorgsky gave another long description of what he was doing and planning to do.

To determine the true reasons for Mussorgsky's refusal seems impossible. Had he fallen a prey to some form of partial abulia? Was he unable to shake off the yoke of dipsomania, and feeling conscious that he could not be sure of being in a fit condition to meet his friends abroad, and especially Liszt? Was it excess of conscientiousness, and did his plans for *Khovanshchina* so absorb him that he really felt it impossible to interrupt his labour even for a while? He certainly worked hard and to good purpose during the summer months; and a letter to Repin of 13 June shows that throughout the spring ideas had really been 'seething'; for, with Repin, he would have had no reason to allege pressure of work as an excuse:

I simply long to get to business: but, alas! Mother Russia provides me with nothing but office files and reports. A fine dish is on the fire, but who can tell what it will turn out to be? I know in which direction I should strike, I am pressing on, and need no driver. Should obstacles occur, should the towing-rope break, what then? Collapse will follow, of course. But the point is, the people are clamouring to be brought into being. I see them in my sleep, when I eat, when I drink: they are the great, pure, sterling thing. How overwhelming is the wealth of their language, how many musical types it could help to create, so long at least as the country is not overrun with railroads! It is an inexhaustible mine in which to find the genuine, the whole life of the Russian people. But this for a genuine artist, will mean hard work, work such as you have put into your 'Towing-Men' [one of Repin's most famous paintings]. And our musicians rest content with devising differences of harmony and waste their energies fussing about technical details: lamentable! painters have known for centuries how to mix their colours, and they carry on unconstrainedly, according as they are gifted: but our brother musician ponders, calculates, and having calculated starts pondering afresh. Puerility, sheer puerility!

All this, written at the very time when Mussorgsky's bouts of drinking were causing great anxiety to his friends, is very much in the same vein as the letters of 1872. But in the other letters of 1873 faint indications are noticeable of a dual frame of mind: on the one hand, the urge to press forward and achieve great things, on the other hand a feeling of the uselessness of it all. Sentences such as "either escape or starve to death", "the people suffer, and are driven to drink, only to suffer all the more", and "the fault lies with the country, which produces herbs of whose existence she is unaware, having no need for them", may well be regarded as expressing his own discouragement. Was he despondent because of the difficulty of getting *Boris* produced? He had no reason to be, for things were moving. As early as 5 February, three scenes from it had been given with great success at the Marinsky Theatre. In March Bessel had announced the opening of a subscription to the vocal score, to be published shortly; and Mussorgsky had delivered the manuscript to him on 14 May. He was, it will be remembered, inclined by nature to take a sanguine rather than a pessimistic view of things.

Nor is it possible to suspect that any perturbing influence from without had been at work. He was living—apart from his uncongenial official duties—under pleasant and, on the whole, stimulating conditions. His life with Rimsky-Korsakof having come to an end in the spring, shortly before the latter's marriage, he had started sharing rooms with Arseny Golenishchef-Kutuzof, a young relative of his and a poet, of whom he was fond and whose talent he greatly admired. Golenishchef-Kutzuof was a well-balanced, conservatively minded man, who tried his utmost to exercise a restraining influence upon Mussorgsky's musical radicalism, and also to restrain him in other directions—acting, his biographer, Zveref, records (in the preface to his collected works (St. Petersburg, 1914)), "like a vigilant nurse, and following his weak friend everywhere so far as possible".

It has been surmised that the sudden death on 23 July, at the age of thirty-nine, of a very dear friend of Mussorgsky's, the painter and architect Victor Hartmann, may have contributed to demoralize him. But he had succumbed long before that date; and it is possible, on the contrary, that the blow helped him to pull himself together, if only through a sense of the duty he owed to the memory of his friend, and (as Pauline Stassova had reminded him) to Russian art, the art which Hartmann had served so well.

So, maybe, the only explanation of his collapse lies in the fact that he was, in Repin's words, "a quondam officer in the Guards"; the infection contracted at the School for Cadets and cultivated during his period of service was mainly responsible.

He managed to react quickly enough, and during the last few months of that year, the atmosphere became appreciably brighter for himself and for his anxious friends. He worked at *Khovanshchina* with a will. On 11 November Bessel announced that the new opera was in hand, and that one excerpt from it, Marfa's song, would shortly appear. He received a further step in *tchin*, whether as a matter of routine or not is not clear. And meanwhile, the news had come (on 22 October) that *Boris Godunof* was accepted at last by the Committee of the Imperial Theatres (see next chapter). All through November and December Mussorgsky was kept busy with preparations for the forthcoming event, and also with *Khovanshchina*. He also remodelled his choral *Destruction of Sennacherib*, inscribing the new version (which was never published) to Stassof:

> You remember that Balakiref thought the first version great fun, and that he arranged for its performance in 1867. I inscribed that first version to him: let the dedication be a memorial of the past. You, my dear friend, pointed out to me the imperfections of the middle section of the work. I was in close contact with you while remodelling it; and together we garnered applause from many motley audiences. But the main point is that this second version won your approval forthwith. So I inscribe it to you, joyfully and proudly.
>
> (to Stassof, 2 January 1872).

The first performance of the work, scored by Rimsky-Korsakof, took place on 18 February 1874, at a charity concert.

Mussorgsky also prepared an arrangement with piano accompaniment of choral numbers from Sarti's opera *Oleg* (1785), which were required to illustrate a lecture given by a university professor. January 1874 was a month of hectic work, culminating on the 27th in the first performance of *Boris* at the Marinsky Theatre.

CHAPTER X

The first *Boris Godunof*

Mussorgsky works at great speed—The first version completed —The libretto—The music—His friends' attitude to the work—Its rejection compels him to remodel it

FROM the moment when Nikolsky suggested to him, as a subject for an opera, Pushkin's play *The Comedy of the Distress of the Muscovite State, of Tsar Boris, and of Grishka Otrepief*, Mussorgsky allowed no other thought to divert his mind. He started work in October 1868, and carried on without a break until he reached the end. The speed at which he worked can be judged by the dates which the autograph manuscripts bear. According to the autograph libretto, the vocal score of the first scene was finished on 4 November; that of the second, on 14 November; that of the third on 5 December. No date is given for the scene at the inn nor for the final scene, but scene 5 bears the date 21 April 1869, and scene 6, that of "night of 21-22 May". The autograph full score gives the dates: scene 2, 30 September 1869: scene 5, 19 October 1869; scene 7, 15 December 1869—which means rather less than fifteen months in all.

As already mentioned, we have no information whatever as to the spirit in which he proceeded, nor as to the discussions he may have had with his friends during this first period of his labours on *Boris Godunof*, the fruit of which was what is now known as the initial version of this opera.*

We know that Stassof provided him with texts to draw from while building up the libretto, and may surmise that he offered suggestions as well. It was he who discovered, in an old printed collection, the words of the song 'By the walls of Kazan' which the vagabond monk Varlaam sings in scene 4. (Pushkin had not included this text in his play, but merely written: "Varlaam starts singing the old song 'By the walls of Kazan' ".) Mussorgsky had been delighted with the find.

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* The word 'opera' is used advisedly. There is no evidence whatever in support of the assertion, to be found in von Riesemann's and von Wolfurt's biographies, that he ever intended to entitle *Boris* a 'national drama of the people'. On the contrary, all known autographs (including several loose sheets on which he drafted various wordings of the title—see Lamm edition, Preface, p. xiii—) show him uniformly using the word 'opera'.

Liudmila Shestakova had presented Mussorgsky with an interleaved and bound copy of Pushkin's play for him to use in preparing the libretto; and on the blank sheets he wrote the text of the first five scenes. This book is now in the MS department of the Leningrad public library. On the first page is written, in Mussorgsky's hand; "Here, dearest Liudmila Ivanovna, you have, all complete, the work of which you were the witness—27 January 1874" (the date of the first performance of *Boris*). And in Shestakova's hand: "1874, 31 March: I transfer all my rights on this volume to Bach, that is, Vladimir Vassilievitch Stassof, Liudmila Shestakova". On the second page, Mussorgsky wrote: "*Boris Godunof*, opera in four parts by M. Mussorgsky. Subject borrowed from Pushkin's dramatic chronicle of the same name, many of his verses being preserved in the libretto. The composition and scoring of the opera were finished in July 1872 at Petrograd. M. Mussorgsky. N.B. Conceived during the autumn of 1868, the work was begun in October 1868. It was for the purpose that this volume was prepared by Liudmila Shestakova."

The question of the relationship, from the literary and dramatic point of view, between the play and Mussorgsky's libretto, either in its initial form of 1868–9 or its final form, is outside the scope of this book.* So is the question of the relationship between the story of Tsar Boris as told by Pushkin and Mussorgsky on the basis of Karamzin's *History of the Russian Empire* and the actual historical facts (which show that Boris did not instigate the murder of the Tsarevitch Dimitri). What is of interest, however, is to note both Mussorgsky's indebtedness to Pushkin, in whose play he found a firm basis on which to build, and also many fine scenes and speeches, in verse or in prose, fit to be used exactly as they stood, or almost, and the extraordinary dramatic sense and literary ability which he displayed in his adaptation. Pushkin devotees have criticized him severely; but, all told, he cannot be said to have overstepped the bounds of the permissible in the matter of adaptation for the purposes of the musical stage-play. Pushkin, in his treatment of his subject, is extraordinarily restrained: so much so that unless one has seen the play, it is impossible to tell how much of it is effective on the stage, although it makes very fine reading.

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* The subject was discussed in *Music & Letters*, xxvi (1945), p. 31.—*Ed.*

This terseness and simplicity served Mussorgsky well. A less satisfactory point was its structure: it consists of twenty-four scenes (some of them very brief) loosely strung together, which illustrate separate moments and aspects of the tragedy, and whose significance to spectators depends in a large measure upon their knowing the story of Tsar Boris. The same criticism has been levelled, far less justifiably, at Mussorgsky's libretto.

This consists, like the play, of a series of cross-sections, so to speak; of scenes every one of which shows us a crucial point in the progress of the tragedy—a twofold tragedy: on the one hand that of Tsar Boris, on the other hand that of the Russian people, suffering and threatened with a grim, unknown future. The scenes are seven in number: four taken from Pushkin and more or less modified, but without their structure being affected, two devised by Mussorgsky on the basis of indications in the play, and one—the Council and the Tsar's death—evolved from two separate scenes (the sixteenth and the twenty-first) in it. Unavoidably, certain points of secondary interest were sacrificed in the process, but many, of vital interest, were added. The plot is far more closely knit than in the play, and its progress far more direct and speedy. Even without the additional bond of union that the music provides, the libretto is compact, beautifully co-ordinated and balanced; it forms a whole in which there is nothing superfluous, nothing that is not vitally important. The order of the scenes is:

1. Boris Godunof, who in order to become Tsar has caused the heir to the throne, Dimitri, the young son of Ivan the Terrible, to be murdered, is pretending to decline the crown. He has withdrawn into a monastery. Meanwhile (this is the point at which the opera begins) his agents have mustered the people outside the monastery and are compelling them—who do not know in the least what it is all about—to implore him to accept it. In turn the Chancellor of the Duma (State Council) and a procession of pilgrims urge them to pray the Lord that Boris may relent. The people remain bewildered and indifferent, although they have been shouting lustily under the threat of the police officers' cudgels. They are ordered to assemble the next morning by the Kremlin, to receive fresh instructions. The scene corresponds to scenes 2 and 4 in the play, but with essential differences. The people are shown in an entirely different light: in the play, they implore Boris spontaneously, and there are neither police officers nor pilgrims.

2. The coronation of Boris. The people hail their new Tsar, who is haunted by evil forebodings and secret terrors. But, pulling himself together, he invites them all to a great banquet. There is no coronation scene in Pushkin: only a brief speech of the Tsar to the patriarch and the noblemen after his coronation. Portions of this speech were used by Mussorgsky.

3. At a later period. In his cell at night, a venerable monk Pimen, is engaged in writing the final chapter of a chronicle of Russia. With him is a novice, Grigory Otrepief, whose mind is perturbed by obscene visions and ambitions. Hearing from Pimen the story of Boris's crime, Grigory secretly resolves to avenge the murdered Tsarevitch. This deeply impressive scene is an abridgement of scene 5 in the play, without any other alteration.

4. Grigory has escaped from the monastery. Along with two vagabond monks, Varlaam and Missail, he is trying to reach the Lithuanian border. The three arrive at an inn near the border; and, while his companions converse, he ascertains from the hostess the way into Lithuania. Soldiers appear. Their orders are to find and arrest the fugitive. He is identified, but manages to escape. This is scene 8 in the play, slightly abridged, and with additional touches of comedy in Varlaam's part.

5. Five years after the coronation, in the Tsar's private apartments, Xenia, his daughter, is bewailing the death of her betrothed, and the nurse vainly tries to cheer her up. Feodor, his son, is studying a map of Russia. Boris enters, speaks words of comfort to Xenia and praises Feodor for his industry. Then, in a poignant monologue, he expresses his cares, his anger with those who misinterpret his every action and accuse him of countless crimes. A boyar appears, and tells him that his Councillor-in-Chief, Shuisky, craves audience, also informing him that Shuisky and other noblemen are secretly communicating with Lithuania. Shuisky enters with the news that a pretender to the throne of Russia has arisen in that country. "Is he dangerous?" Boris asks. Shuisky replies that the pretender describes himself as Dimitri, the son of Tsar Ivan, miraculously saved from death—this after a long exordium cunningly calculated to stir Boris out of his indifference. Boris, infuriated, orders that strict measures be taken to guard the frontier. Then, suspicion and terror gradually entering his soul, he starts questioning Shuisky. Is it quite certain that Dimitri was dead? Shuisky, under colour of reassuring him, gives so graphic a description of the body of the murdered child lying in the church

at Uglitch that Boris breaks down. In a hallucination he sees Dimitri's ghost threatening him. This is, in all essentials except for the breakdown and hallucination, scene 10 in the play, but the Tsar's monologue was taken from another scene, the seventh.

6. Outside the St. Basil Cathedral in Moscow. The people have heard Grigory (who now passes as Dimitri the Tsarevitch) anathematized. They are convinced that Dimitri is alive, and that his armies now marching against Boris will be victorious. The younger men start shouting: "Down with Boris!" The elders warn them to be cautious. A simpleton appears; urchins tease him and rob him of a groat which he had proudly displayed. Boris, with his retinue, comes out of the cathedral. The people all implore him to give them bread. The simpleton calls out: "Boris! The wicked boys have stolen my groat. Command that they be murdered as by your order was murdered the young Tsarevitch." Shuisky orders the guards to seize him, but Boris intervenes: "Don't touch him! Man of God, pray for me." But the simpleton replies: "No, Boris! One must not pray for a Tsar Herod: the Holy Virgin would not allow it." And in the silence that follows, he proceeds to mend his bast shoes, singing a mournful song: 'Weep, weep bitter tears, poor Russian people'. This is scene 18 in the play, expanded by additional dialogue, the imploration of the people, and the final plaint.

7. In the Council Hall in the Tsar's palace. The Chancellor reads out an edict of the Tsar against the Pretender. While the Councillors discuss it, Shuisky enters, is accused by them of double dealing, but diverts their attention by announcing that the Tsar is ailing, and tormented by weird phantasms. Then, all of a sudden, the Tsar breaks in, distraught, pursued by the vision of the murdered child. He regains his composure a while; but after hearing from the lips of the monk, Pimen, a description of a miracle that has taken place by Dimitri's tomb, he breaks down again and dies after a final exhortation to his son. This is partly a compound of scenes 16 and 21 in the play. But all that occurs until Pimen's entry is Mussorgsky's. The narrative, in the play, comes not from Pimen, but from the patriarch in council (scene 16) who tells it in order to show that the Pretender is an impostor. It does not cause the Tsar's final collapse, which takes place (scene 21) behind the stage—Boris, who had been discussing matters quite calmly with one of his Councillors, having left the room a while to receive foreign visitors in council, is brought back a minute or two later

in a dying condition. This, it is said, is how Boris's death actually occurred, without immediate, obvious cause. Mussorgsky preferred to make Pimen appear as an instrument of Providence—possibly a conscious one, and certainly one who plays into Shuisky's hands. This was an idea of genius.

In short, every one of Mussorgsky's alterations is defensible from the dramatic point of view—and also, splendidly carried out from the literary. Many of them create opportunities for significant music in addition to those afforded by Pushkin's text. He did not aim at emulating the matter-of-factness and uniformity of treatment of Dargomyjsky's *Stone Guest.*

In fact, the music of *Boris*, with its alternation and blend of realistic, lyrical, and symphonic treatment—this consisting mainly in the use of leitmotives, thematic derivations, and theme-transformations—is something that was unparalleled at the time and has proved inimitable. So is, all told, the libretto, a model of starkness and terseness.

It does not, like the later version, afford hearers any opportunity for relief. It pursues its grim course without an instant of intermission, except when the tension is relieved a while by touches of character-comedy in the dialogue (first and sixth scenes, the people; scene at the inn; Feodor and the nurse at the beginning of the fifth scene). And even at these points, there is nothing (except Varlaam's song, 'By the walls of Kazan, the mighty stronghold') that comes as an intermezzo inducing a halt, however brief, in the action. Every one of these touches is part and parcel of the whole.

A very remarkable feature (one, indeed, that makes this version something unique in the history of lyric drama) is that Grigory never reappears after he has effected his escape into Lithuania and begun his activities as the Pretender. He remains in the background, evoked time after time by references made by Shuisky, by Boris, by the people, and by the Councillors. And these allusions are made doubly pregnant by corresponding reappearances and transformations of the leitmotive first introduced in association with the murdered Tsarevitch. Hence a particular significance attaches to the fact that this is used in connection with both the Tsarevitch and his impersonator—the two unseen terrors haunting Boris and gradually breaking down his resistance, and the two main factors in what is the real tragedy of Mussorgsky's masterpiece: the fate of Russia.

No better preface to the study of libretto and music could be found than the following paragraphs from an essay by Eric Blom, entitled 'Constructive and Destructive Influences in Music'.*

> Mussorgsky's operas completely overthrow Wagner's system and show what extraordinarily dramatic and deeply human music can be written if Wagnerian verbosity be replaced by a strict limitation to the barest essentials and by setting down music as it flows from the heart instead of building it up laboriously from so many bricks that have been carefully trimmed beforehand. We cannot help feeling, on listening to *Boris Godunof*, that this, after all, is the way to write an opera. In the libretto of *Boris*, for example, the dramatically important coronation scene is sketched in a few words, nothing more than a mere framework that could not stand upright without the music. *Boris*, therefore, is essentially an opera and nothing but an opera, whereas Wagner's dramas, with their logical development, their explanatory dialogues and soliloquies, their diffuseness that takes care to reveal by means of the text all that the characters do and feel, would be by no means elliptical without music.

These remarks refer to the libretto of the final version (the only one known in 1923), but apply with equal, if not greater, force to that of the initial version.

It may be added that the musical texture and structure of *Boris*, although certainly not suggestive of laborious building-up or of laboriously explanatory intentions, are by no means as artless and obvious as they might suggest to the uninformed. Indeed, there is a danger that by stressing the many significant analogies, correspondences, and other points of purely technical interest that the study of the score reveals—by discoursing, to quote Mussorgsky himself, on the butter, eggs, and so on, that went to the making of the pie—one may convey the reverse impression. One good reason for taking the risk is that in order to defeat on their own chosen ground Mussorgsky's censors, who are ever proclaiming that his methods were crude and clumsy, it is necessary to talk technique.

His use of leitmotives in *The Marriage* has already been referred to (in chapter VII). In *Boris*, he resorts not only to leitmotives, but also to a valuable process never used before in dramatic music, and hardly ever in instrumental music (the main theme of the Allegro in Berlioz's *Francs-Juges* Overture, however, is vaguely outlined in the introduction): the foreshadowing of themes that take their full form later. The principle, it will be remembered, was formulated in a letter referring to *The Marriage* (see *supra* pp. 98–9).

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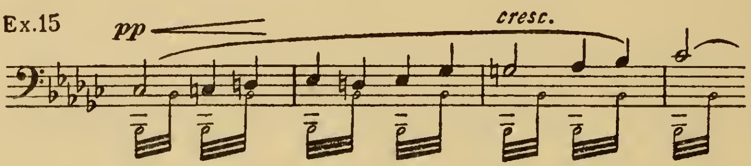
* *Musical Quarterly*, July 1923.

Throughout the score of *Boris* we notice seeds that germinate each in due time, brief passages embodying allusions to, or containing germs of, music that will unfold itself later, and playing a part in the extraordinary unity of the texture. We may not perceive these as leitmotives whose reappearances and transformations need be watched: they do their work all the more thoroughly and subtly for that reason. Quite possibly, he was not conscious of every connection that arose as he wrote the music of *Boris*. It is quite admissible that the main elements, at times, just grew out of one another, their mutual relation being as logical, as inevitable, as that of a branch to the root of the tree.

This may or may not be the explanation of analogies such as this: during the Chancellor's speech to the people (scene 1: "Boris, despite our entreaties, refuses the crown . . .")we hear music:

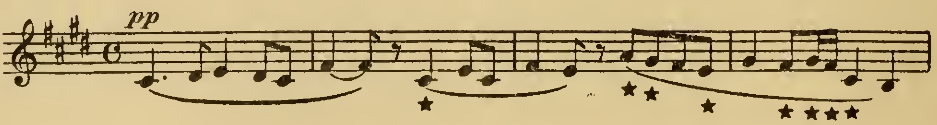
Ex.15



which foreshadows both the character and the actual design of motives that will be extensively used in connection with Tsar Boris, (see *infra*, Ex. 27 and 28).

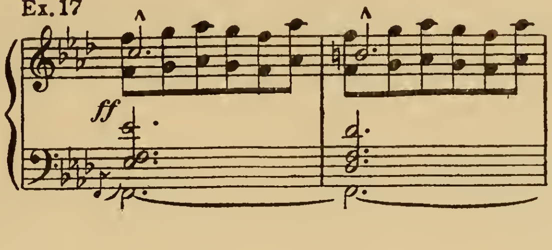
The various foreshadowings of the Dimitri theme are of specially deep significance. The first occurs in the opening bars of the prologue, a brief instrumental prelude based on a folk-tune-like melody:

Ex.16

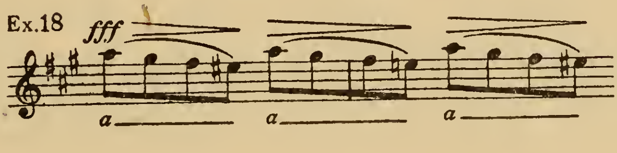


which also plays the main part in the final section of the first scene (the people discussing matters after the pilgrims have left), and provides a variety of materials used in the course of this scene and after. For instance, in the opening chorus:

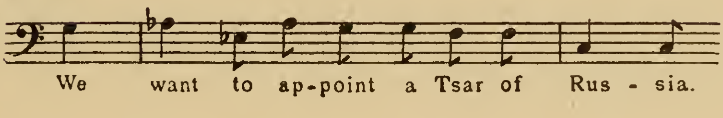
Ex.17



Ex.18

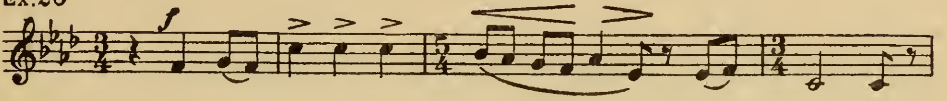


Ex.19



Even the main theme of this chorus:

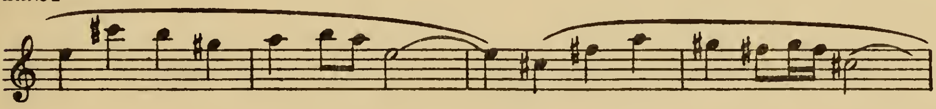
Ex.20



has affinities with it.

The Dimitri theme consists of two closely similar designs:

Ex.21



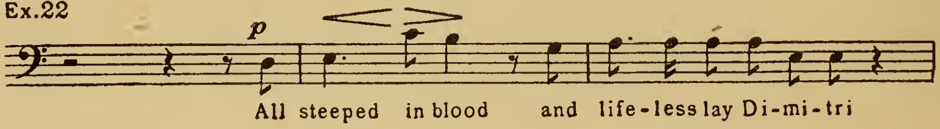
the first of which is used as leitmotive more often than the second. The first is present, note for note, in the initial melody (notes marked by asterisks in Ex. 16), and also the second, as can easily be found out.

This, surely, despite the fact that the final notes of the design are a traditional folk-song cadence, often used by Mussorgsky (notably in his earliest song, 'Little Star') and by other Russians too, cannot be a mere accident. It is impossible to tell whether Mussorgsky calculated it, or whether it happened inevitably, owing to the unconscious working of his creative imagination.

It would be stranger still if the relation of this motive to the theme expressing Tsar Boris's anxiety, which is heard the very moment he appears in the coronation scene (see *infra*, Ex. 26) should also be a mere coincidence.

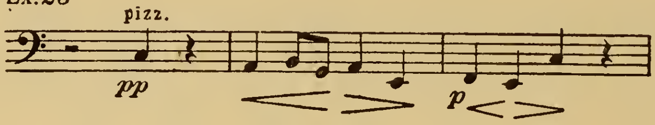
The last foreshadowing occurs in Pimen's narrative of the murder, thus:

Ex.22



shortly before the motive is heard in its definite form (the first part of Ex. 21). Let it be noticed, too, that the main element in the music of the narrative is:

Ex.23



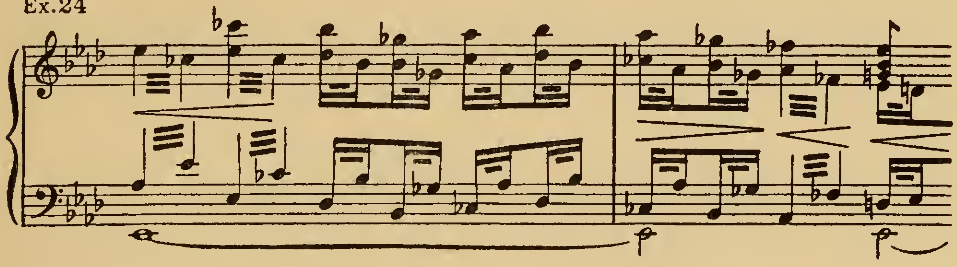
to which Ex. 21 is obviously related.

Needless to point out that if, as surmised here, Mussorgsky more or less consciously gave the Dimitri theme so remarkably significant a pedigree, he was justified in so doing, considering the all-important and complex functions that he destined the theme to fulfil.

As a leitmotive, it refers, in the scene in the cell, to the murdered Tsarevitch, reappearing when Pimen says to Grigory: "He'd be your age or almost, and reign to-day." ("At this point", Mussorgsky stipulates, "Grigory rises, majestic, head high, and, with feigned humility sits down again"), and at the end, when Grigory expresses his horror of Boris's crime. But in the scene at the inn, it becomes associated with Grigory escaping into Lithuania, to rise against Boris as Dimitri the Pretender. It appears in the second section of the brief prelude—the first consisting of elements associated with the vagabond monks—and several times during the scene, usually in jauntier form (vocal score, pp. 88, 99, 106).

And from this point on, as already mentioned, it is associated with the Tsarevitch Dimitri (Shuisky's description of the body in scene 5; Pimen's narrative of the miracle in scene 7, etc.) with Grigory in his assumed character (scene 6: the people talking of the triumphant progress of his armies), and with Boris's fear of both the haunting phantom (scene 5, *passim*:

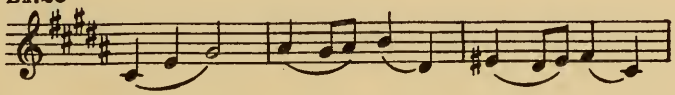
Ex.24



—a vividly graphic transformation), and of the Pretender (his dying speech to his son).

No other theme or leitmotive in *Boris* is used to so great an extent. The only other themes to be used for allusive purposes now and then are those connected with Tsar Boris, three in number. One, suggesting his majesty and power:

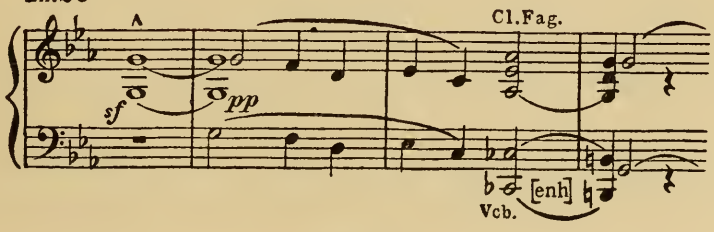
Ex.25



appears in the first part of his monologue, and often afterwards. It is used allusively twice only, in the final scene: when the Chancellor is about to read the edict, and after the Tsar's death, by way of instrumental peroration—the only one of its kind in the whole score.

Another referring to the heavy burden of his cares and fears:

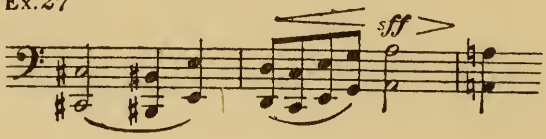
Ex.26



is heard when he appears in the coronation scene, in the instrumental bars preceding his monologue in scene 5, the bars of massive chords in the course of it (see, notably, pp. 37, 39-40, and 43 of the full score, the tuba part), and in the scene with the simpleton. It is used allusively in the scene at the inn, when the police officer refers to the Tsar's order that the fugitive be caught; and in the last scene when Shuisky prepares to inform the Councillors of the Tsar's ravings.

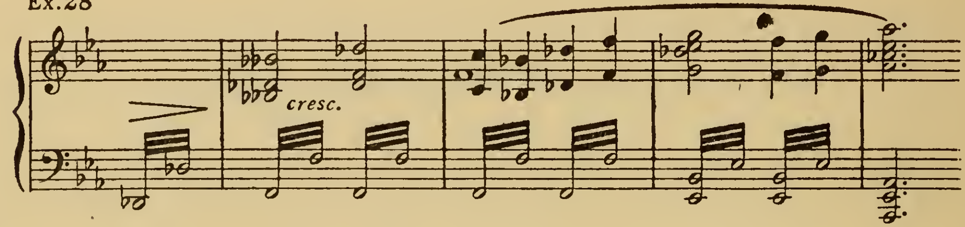
The third, connected with his anger, and also with his remorse:

Ex. 27



appears in the course of the monologue, in the scene with Shuisky, and the Tsar's hallucination, in his dying speech to his son, and, for an allusive purpose, while Shuisky is describing his ravings to the Councillors—at which point the relation between it and the 'majesty' theme is made clear by this fusion of the two (v.s. p. 341-42):

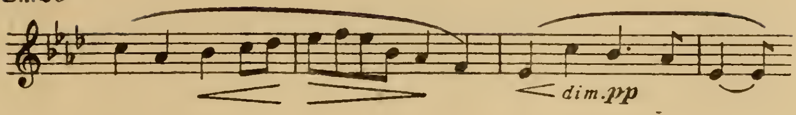
Ex. 28



This relation, like many others mentioned here, carries no symbolic implication, but is of interest to students of texture.

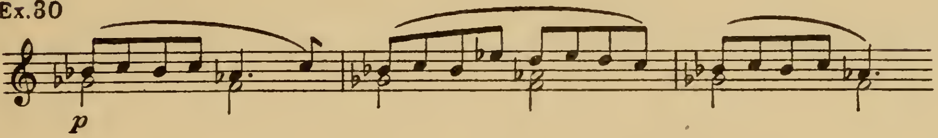
The threefold characterization achieved by means of these very expressive motives is of rare psychological value and technical interest. The fact that all three, besides being specifically connected with Tsar Boris, are used for allusions to him seems to have been insufficiently considered by Andreï Rimsky-Korsakof, who says: "No leitmotive is used in connexion with Boris", and by Riesemann and others, who repeated the assertion and improved on it. Two other aspects of the Tsar's personality are expressed musically: his love for his daughter by a beautifully pure and tender melody:

Ex. 29



his love for his son by a delightful little motive:

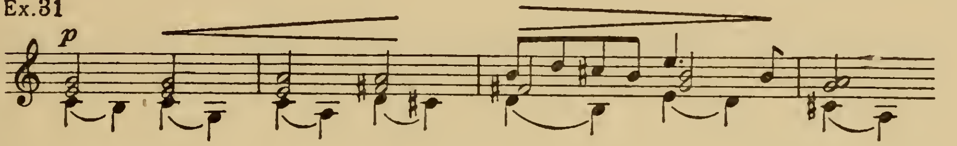
Ex. 30



which lends itself to a variety of telling harmonizations. A good reason for not regarding these elements as Xenia and Feodor themes, as several analysts have done, is that they do not arise in the early part of scene 5, the one point at which Xenia is on the the stage and the only one at which Feodor is there without his father being present.

There are not many individual leitmotives of importance in *Boris*. Yet, the other two characters embodying the forces arrayed against the Tsar—Pimen, the force of immanent justice, and Shuisky, the force of intrigue and hatred—each has his own motive: Shuisky's a sinuous design graphically suggestive of his cunning and his honeyed manners:

Ex. 31



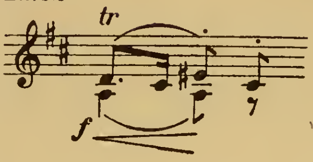
Pimen's, a grave, calm phrase, which naturally has affinities with old church music.

The melody of the Pimen theme is modal, and so built as hardly to suggest any particular tonality. So Mussorgsky is able to harmonize it in many different ways, thereby and by other slight changes, never affecting its design or rhythm, adapting it to the expression of Pimen's various feelings. (Questions of melodic and harmonic structure, modality, tonality, and so forth will be dealt with in chapters XVI–XVIII.)

A few secondary characters have personal motives too:

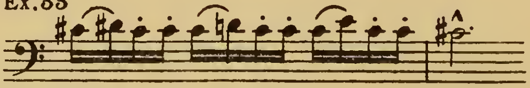
Varlaam, a forcible, little rhythmic pattern,

Ex.32



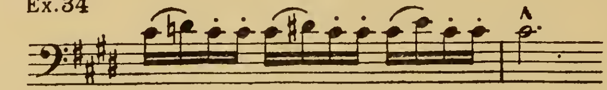
which Mussorgsky uses skilfully and aptly as both a structural and a pantomimic element throughout the inn scene; the police officers also a rhythmic pattern, pantomimic in character, which is, in the vocal score:

Ex.33



and in the full score:*

Ex.34



It is used not only in the first scene, but also in the inn scene and in an altered form at the beginning of the scene by St. Basil's (when policemen patrol the crowd, but without interfering). There are suggestions of it in the cornation scene (vocal score, pp. 41 ff.).

Leitmotives, theme transformations, and correspondences, Mussorgsky's main resources for structural purposes, are but one order of the resources he uses for characterization, the main thing being the marvellously supple, sensitive style of each vocal part. Points worthy of special notice in this respect are the shape of the melodic line, the variety of colour resulting from modulations and changes of pitch; the character of the declamation (not in recitative only), its pace, punctuation, pauses; and the wide diversity of patterns, rhythms, inflexions, and accents brought into play. Everywhere Mussorgsky achieves that maximum of specificness and differentiation which the minimum-of-stylization principle aims at ensuring: one might say, without referring to the actors' contribution, that every one of the characters has not only a mode of speech, but a tone of voice typically his own.

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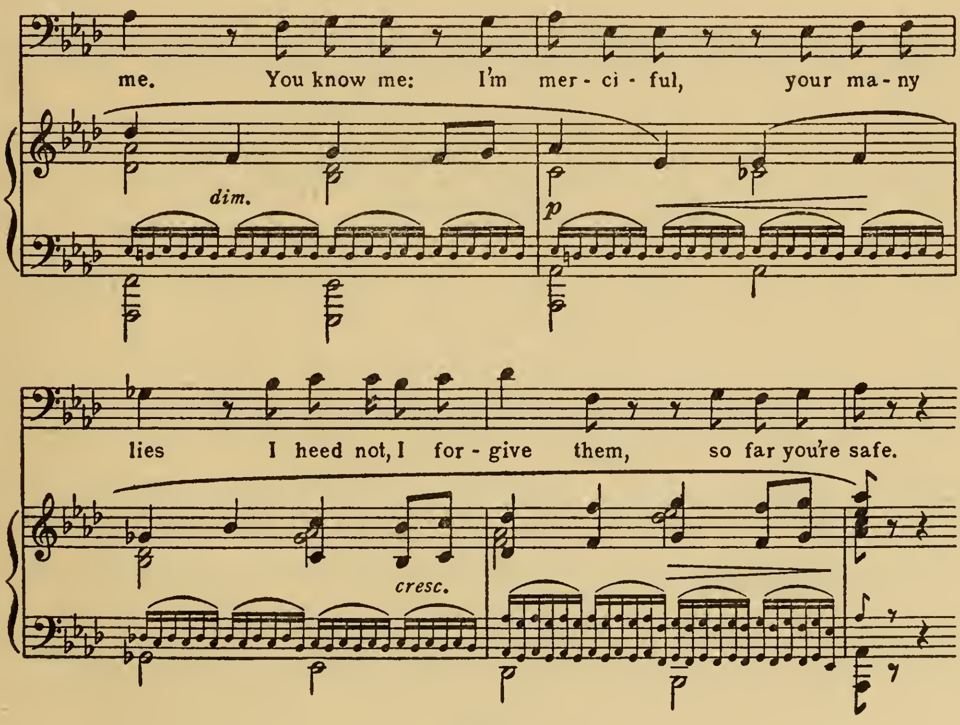
* This is not the outcome of a misprint: for in either score the motive, at every one of its appearances, remains what it was at the first. It is reasonable to suppose that the full score always represents Mussorgsky's final decision. When, in 1896, Rimsky-Korsakof revised *Boris*, he rightly selected the form given in the full score. Later, at a time when the full score was still unavailable for study, several critics of Rimsky-Korsakof's version—Robert Godet and the present writer among others—included this in the list they gave of unjustifiable alterations.

All this, as emphasized by Andreï Rimsky-Korsakof (and of such matters Russians alone are fully competent to judge) is done with perfect ease and naturalness: "Never at random, but with admirable logic and deep artistic feeling. As an example of swiftly, freely flowing musical discourse, fraught with objective psychological meaning and poetic significance, *Boris* stands unique in the whole repertory of the art. The music is so spontaneous in character that often it conveys the impression of an improvisation. Its efficacy and orderliness accrue from the fact that Mussorgsky's genius was of an unusual type: it operated, like the forces of nature, under the guidance of powerful, unconscious creative impulses."[17]

Despite the fact that the periods are short, the music also conveys the impression of an uninterrupted, almost invariably melodic line. On this point, another remark in the same essay is worth considering: "This impression is partly the result of an illusion: the vocal part and the accompaniment jointly often form a continuous melodic flow; but on the other hand, the one or the other occasionally consists of disjoined, dissimilar bits"—e.g.:

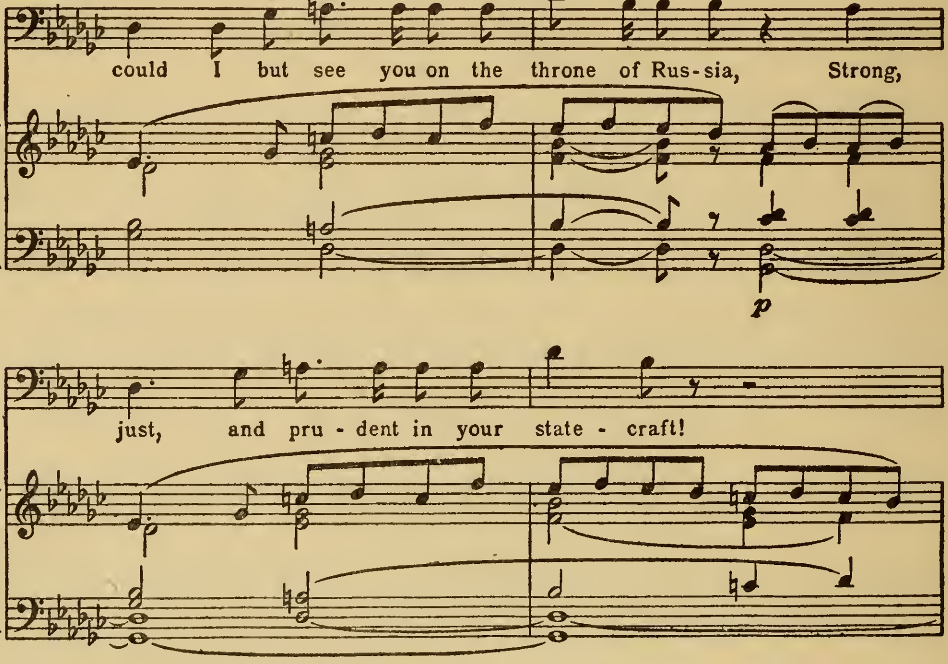
Ex. 35


me. You know me: I'm mer - ci - ful, your ma - ny
dim.
p
lies I heed not, I for - give them, so far you're safe.
cresc.

The example provides a good illustration of melodic recitative in the vocal parts and organized melody in the instrumental—an arrangement common enough in *Boris* and other of Mussorgsky's works, and so useful that it counts in the composer's favour, especially as it never means his straining the music or resorting to trickery. Here let it be noted that what appears in the orchestra is the 'majesty' theme, aptly used even though, at the moment, Boris is concerned with making his point and not with asserting his sovereignty.

Elsewhere, on the contrary, we find two distinct, continuous melodic strains:

Ex. 36


could I but see you on the throne of Rus-sia, Strong,
p
just, and pru - dent in your state - craft!

This leads us to consider, more generally, the relations between the instrumental and the vocal part.

The accompaniment, at its simplest (except, of course, when its function happens for a while to be reduced to sustaining the voice), provides confirmation, additional colour and emphasis, reinforces accents. Often it consists of thematic elements relevantly used, and is in itself highly dramatic and suggestive. It may also provide a background (notably: vocal score, pp. 60-1, Grigory's dream; p. 63, Pimen's visions of " boisterous feasts and lusty warfare"; pp. 120-1, Feodor marvelling at the course of the Volga—but here the piano part conveys no adequate idea of the evocative power of the music: see full score, pp. 7-11; and especially the evocation of desert, snow-clad regions while Grigory is questioning the hostess about the way into Lithuania).

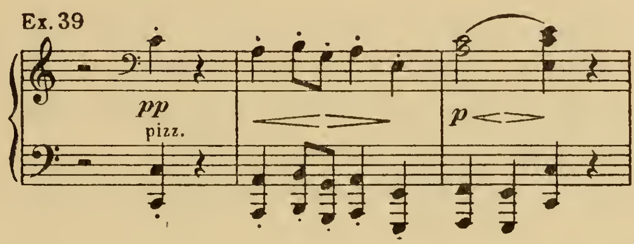
Independent comments are few. When they occur, they consist chiefly of themes used allusively, as already explained.

The term correspondences used a while ago covers not only the thematic affinities and derivations of which a few have been mentioned, not only resemblances that may be accidental, yet are present and suggestive,* but broad parallelisms in the situations and in the music.

In the St. Basil scene, as in the opening scene, the people are assembled—no longer passive and indifferent, but restive; and as in the coronation scene, Boris appears, but only to hear his subjects clamour for help in their distress. The music does not markedly underline the analogies, yet there are resemblances perceptible enough to create links that have a value in the structural scheme of the score. Similar but more striking analogies are noticeable in the revolution scene in the final version (composed in 1872).

In the scene in the cell, Pimen's narrative of the murder stirs Grigory to action; in the final scene, his narrative of the miracle brings about the Tsar's collapse. The music of both narratives is based on two all but identical forms of one theme: for the first:

Ex. 39



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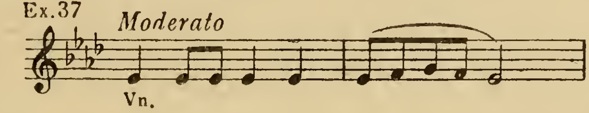
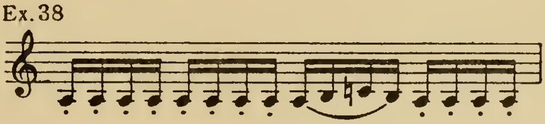
* For instance, the main motive used in the early part of the debate in council, the subject of which is Grigory's rising:

Ex. 37



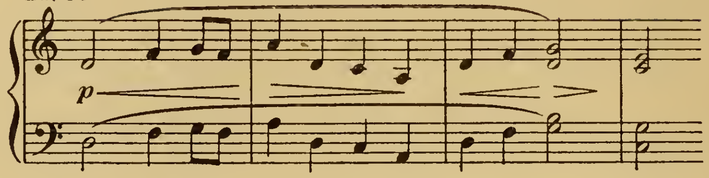
is note for note the pattern that appeared in the inn scene at the moment of Grigory's escape:

Ex. 38



for the second:

Ex. 40



Truly an outstanding example of adaptation of one musical element to contrasting ends (the expression of tragic emotion, and of serene, mystic faith), a few slight differences of design, colour, and dynamics producing a thorough change of character; and also, a splendid architectural feature.

Other parallelisms show Mussorgsky's consistency in using this structural process whenever possible. None of them runs counter to the minimum-of-stylization principle. Nowadays, for instance, the music of the second narrative does not produce an impression of lesser naturalness, spontaneity, and fitness than it did in the days when (the first narrative being unknown) no question arose of tracing its materials back to an outside source. And not even those critics who are wise after the event could contend that either form of the theme seems manufactured or laboured in the least.

The above remarks show that while "setting down music as it flowed from his heart", Mussorgsky did not fail to build it up skilfully and ingeniously. The structure and balance (the tonal balance, and also a number of other technical points, will be considered in chapter XVIII) are such as could only be achieved by an artist who had seen his work whole.

One important consequence of Mussorgsky's policy of economy is that the pace never slows down a single instant. Once the dialogue has started, breaks are few and brief. So are preambles and perorations. The opening scene, for instance, has a brief prelude (on the nineteenth bar of which the curtain rises) showing the people assembling. Another six bars, and the police officer enters. He is given a few seconds to scowl at the people, and the dialogue starts. Seven bars for the people to recover their breath after their first bout of yelling, five for the Chancellor's entry, and thirteen between the end of the pilgrims' chorus and the resumption of the dialogue are the only breaks of any perceptible length; and there is a nine-bar instrumental conclusion during which the stage gradually empties.

In Act ii we have a six-bar prelude, a six-bar break in the Tsar's talk to Xenia, a seven-bar preamble to his monologue, five bars for Shuisky's exit, and three bars as the Tsar sinks, exhausted, to his knees. The music ends abruptly, with the last word of his imploration. Even in the scene in the cell and the final scene, which, naturally, are built on broader lines, the economy is no less.

Needless to expatiate on the practical advantages of this terseness and brisk pace. The actors are never compelled to resort to unnecessary motions or to attitudinizing to fill in time while music has its say. But, of course, plenty of time is given for the requisite amount of acting.

Such is, summarily described, the masterpiece which Mussorgsky finished in December 1869, and which in this first form, the outcome of his spontaneous inspiration and calculations, was not revealed to the world until 1928, well-nigh half a century after his death. The long and short of its history at the time is that it satisfied, as already mentioned, neither the committee of the Imperial Theatres nor his own friends, even though most of the latter realized its originality and power.

He started showing it to them soon after its completion. The earliest record available so far of his so doing is, in a letter of 11 May 1870, from Borodin to his wife, the following brief sentence: "Last Thursday Modenka was at the Makovskys' house and played his *Boris*, which created a great impression. All were delighted with it."

Letters which Borodin wrote after having heard the second version (see p. 168) seem to show that he himself on this first occasion had not been altogether satisfied.

On 13 July Mussorgsky wrote to the sisters Purgold: "I went to see the director. He said that they can produce no new work this year; but they may, towards the middle of August or so, invite me to make their flesh creep with *Boris*."

On 23 July he wrote to Rimsky-Korsakof: "Yesterday at Pargolovo [Stassof's country house] I played my *extravagance* to a big audience. The mujiks in *Boris* impressed some people as comical, but others realized the tragedy of the scene. The inn scene bewildered a great portion of the audience. By the way: I went to see Ghedeonof too. He was strict, but fair, and I also was strict but fair. The result is that I shall be invited after 15 August, but *they* can produce no new work this year."

The interview took place with disastrous results. *Boris* was examined by a committee consisting of Napravnik, the opera conductor, Manjean and Betz, the conductors of French and German operas respectively, and Giovanni Ferrero, the double-bass player. They rejected it, being thoroughly disconcerted by the novelty and unusual character of the music. They blamed the composer for, among other things, the lack of any reasonably important female character in his opera. Many of their quibbles were simply grotesque. For instance, the double basses *divisi* playing chromatic thirds in the accompaniment to Varlaam's second song so shocked Ferrero that he never forgave the composer. Offended and hurt, Mussorgsky withdrew his opera: but, thinking matters over, he decided to overhaul it drastically and make additions to it. The committee's decision did not surprise his friends, most of whom had also been disconcerted. Indeed, Stassof writes:

> All his closest friends, including myself, although moved to enthusiasm by the superb dramatic power and genuinely national character of the work, had constantly been pointing out to him that it lacked many essentials; and that despite the beauties with which it teemed, it might be found unsatisfactory in certain respects. For a long time he stood up (as every genuine artist is wont to do) for his creation, the fruit of his inspiration and meditations. He yielded only after *Boris* had been rejected, the management finding that it contained too many choruses and ensembles (*sic*), whereas individual characters had too little to do. This rejection proved very beneficial to *Boris.*

CHAPTER XI

1872–1873

The second Boris Godunof*—What Mussorgsky may have felt about it—He waxes enthusiastic—The new* Boris *cuts; added scenes; character of the work altered—Comparison of the two versions—His friends enthusiastic—Balakiref's censures—*Boris *again rejected—Excerpts performed in February* 1873*—Success and criticisms—*Boris *accepted at last*

WHAT Mussorgsky's feelings were when he found himself compelled to recast *Boris* we probably shall never know. But when he started work, he did so with a will; and by June 1872 he had finished the remodelling and eking out. The alterations consisted mainly of additions that would bring *Boris* closer to the usual type of opera, and of excisions which, besides shortening scenes that it was surmised, might leave audiences cold, would lessen the risk of objections on the part of the censorship. He suppressed the final section of scene 1, making it end with the dying-out of the pilgrims' chorus; the narrative of the murder in the scene in the cell; and the whole of the St. Basil scene. He gave the innkeeper a merry, rather ribald song to sing before the coming of the monks and Grigory. He incorporated two delightful songs in the first section of Act ii (Xenia, Feodor, and the nurse) and, for less manifest reasons, changed the music of Xenia's lament. The grimness of what followed, from the point at which the Tsar's monologue begins, he relieved by inserting a charming and picturesque episode: the Tsar's monologue is interrupted by shrieks behind the scenes. He sends Feodor to find out what has happened. A moment later—after the boyar has warned the Tsar of Shuisky's plotting—Feodor comes back with the tale of a parrot who has bitten a nurse because she refused to pet it.

He also lengthened the Tsar's monologue considerably, turning it into an *arioso* that branches out into a forecast of the final hallucination, and drastically altering its character. He modified, hardly less drastically, the dialogue with Shuisky. He introduced new and telling effects in the music of the final hallucination: the working of a clock with chimes and puppets, which Feodor at the beginning of the act had been watching with delight, starts again, providing a background that heightens the Tsar's terror; and the music expands into a wonderfully evocative symphony of pulsing basses, whirring violins and flickering woodwind. (Remodelling finished 11 October 1871.) Act iii is entirely new, and in all respects thoroughly operatic. Grigory, now Dimitri the Pretender, comes to his right as an opera tenor, and there is a *prima donna.* The act is partly based on Pushkin's scenes 12 and 14, but Mussorgsky introduces a third character, who is one of the main movers in the plot against Boris.

This is in accordance with history. Indeed, when planning with Stassof's help the additions, he never lost sight of historical reality. The clock on the stage and the parrot episode were suggested by Karamzin's mention of a clock of this kind and of parrots among Tsar Boris's possessions—the latter, apparently, the first to have been imported into Russia.

The act takes place in Poland, in the castle of the Sandomir Voyevod, Mnishek, where the Pretender has his headquarters. He is plotting the Tsar's downfall, and has fallen in love with Mnishek's daughter, Marina.

Scene 1. Marina is sitting at her dressing-table. Her maids of honour entertain her with songs in praise of her beauty, she dreaming the while of the time when she will sit on the throne of Russia. Rangoni enters and urges her to gain influence over the Pretender and to serve the interests of the Roman Church.

Scene 2. In the castle gardens at night, Dimitri awaits Marina by the fountain. Rangoni comes to him and promises to help him win his beloved. The only reward he craves is to be accepted as the Pretender's adviser and guide. After an interlude—the guests dispersing through the gardens (orchestral and choral polonaise) and gleefully anticipating victory over Boris—Marina joins Dimitri at last. At the moment he (as in Pushkin, but Mussorgsky has unaccountably left out capital points in Pushkin's treatment of the scene) is more concerned with the joys of love than with the conquest of Moscow, and he talks of giving up his ambitions in order to live happily with Marina. She persuades him that this would be folly, and the act ends with a love-duet—Rangoni, in the shadow, watching the couple and rejoicing at the success of his scheming.

The composition of the first scene was finished on 10 April 1871;

that of the second, on 14 December; the full score bears the dates: scene 1, 10 February 1872; scene 2, 29 March. According to one account, Mussorgsky had outlined the scene by the fountain in 1868–9, carrying the sketches quite far before deciding to give up the idea.

Act iv, scene 1 is the last scene in the initial version slightly curtailed but otherwise unaltered.

Scene 2. In a forest near Kromy, on the road to Moscow, peasants in revolt are torturing and deriding one of Boris's boyars whom they have captured. The Simpleton appears, as in the St. Basil scene, and his groat is taken from him by the urchins. Varlaam and Missail, who have taken up the Pretender's cause, burst forth and fan the flame of revolt. In turn two Jesuits, Rangoni's agents, arrive singing a Latin prayer: 'Domine, salvum fac regem Demetrium Moscoviae'. Indignantly the two rogue monks urge the crowd to hang the intruders, who are saved by the entry of the Pretender and his troops on their way to Moscow. He addresses the crowd, and as he marches away all follow him. Alarm bells toll from afar, the glow of a great conflagration reddens the sky, distant clamours are heard*, and alone on the stage, the Simpleton sings his final complaint, exactly as in the St. Basil scene—a conclusion of overwhelming impressiveness in its simplicity and quietness.

The date of composition is unknown. The scoring was finished on 23 June 1872.

Particulars given by Vladimir Stassof are interesting:[1]

> We decided jointly that the story in Karamzin of a rising of the people and of the part played by the Jesuits Tchernikovsky and Lavitsky would be taken as the theme of the splendid revolution scene.† The text of the chorus 'Ever rising, ever spreading' is that of a brigands' song communicated by D. L. Mordovtsef. The tune of Varlaam and Missail's song 'Darkness has swallowed sun and moon' is from the repertory of Ivan Trofimovitch Riabinin of Olonetz whom Mussorgsky heard in 1868 at Petersburg. In the winter of 1870,‡ Nikolsky suggested that the revolution scene should be placed not before that of the Tsar's death, but after. That he and not I should have given Mussorgsky this

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* This is only a stage-direction; by a curious omission no provision is made in the score for its carrying out.

† According to other sources, it was Nikolsky who first suggested the idea of introducing the scene.

‡ An obvious mistake for 1871.

brilliant, this grand idea filled me, I must confess, with distress and envy.

Mussorgsky's letters to Stassof contain a few indications as to the gradual rise of his enthusiasm for the work in hand:

> I am finishing the scene. Two nights running the Jesuit has kept me awake. It is nice when one composes thus [18 April 1871].
>
> The guilty Tsar perpetrates a certain *arioso*. In the opinion of musicians, and especially Lodyjensky and Rimsky-Korsakof, this guilty *arioso* is most enjoyable and strikes the ear in most businesslike fashion. And the literature of the aforesaid *arioso* I myself have concocted.
>
> Inasmuch as it is trying and displeasing to see and hear the criminal gritting his teeth, after this a little crowd of nurses rush in, shrieking and lamenting for no known reason,* wherefore the Tsar drives them away and sends his son to find out what the trouble is. [A full description of the episode follows.] With the music, the story of the parrot comes out so tolerably, that the aforesaid musicians kept their ears wide open, so as to absorb and enjoy this tolerable stuff to the full [10 August].
>
> I have the honour to inform your Grace that we have accomplished a shortening of Pimen and rectified Grishka (which means, of course, composed Grishka afresh).† And the Corsican admiral says that the thing is now *momentous* and that we 'hold the trumps'. I am planning a brigands' scene, novelty and novelty—novelty out of novelty! It's great fun [23 September].

The main differences in text and music between the two versions will be discussed in due course. These differences, and also the conflicting evidence we have as to the circumstances of the case from the moment *Boris* was remodelled to the day of the first performance, give rise to baffling problems as to Mussorgsky's psychology and, accessorily, that of his friends and advisers.

Let us provisionally accept the view that, in the remodelling, *Boris Godunof* was improved in many respects, but that certain essential portions of the initial version were either suppressed or deplorably weakened. If we take the purely practical point of view that he had no option but to suppress or weaken these particular portions if he wished to secure the production of his first completed opera, there is nothing further to be said. But this is not good enough; the important thing would be to determine what in his heart of hearts he felt about it all. We may also imagine him taking a childlike delight in proving to his friends that he was perfectly capable of following their advice, as at the time when he was so proud of having been "entrusted with the task of setting to music prose straight out of life" (see *supra*, p. 102).

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* Later, Mussorgsky decided that the shrieks should come from behind the scenes.

† A comparison between the two texts (both in Lamm edition) will show that a recast was needful and that Mussorgsky carried it out well.

Admitting that he was interested in the new opportunities which the remodelling provided, we may imagine him eagerly setting out to display the psychology in accordance with a new conception of it (not a very happy one from the dramatic point of view, as will presently be shown) even though this meant making away with many fine things in the initial version of Act ii. But it is reasonable to suppose that with regard to giving up the St. Basil scene, his feelings must have been very mixed. The scene, from the dramatic point of view, is of capital importance, its one drawback being that it is particularly difficult to produce adequately on the stage. Maybe, too, the musical treatment of the dialogue of the people in it is not as felicitous as might be expected on the strength of the high standard set by the dialogue in the opening scene, but whether he was conscious of its thinness is doubtful. Anyhow, his interest centred in the revolution scene, and he must have felt that this was worth any sacrifice.

One can but wonder what his feelings were when it came to the suppression, pure and simple, of the most significant and splendidly carried out portions. Can he really have approved the notion of shortening Pimen's part by cutting out the narrative of the murder, the very apex of the scene, and one of the corner-stones, both dramatically and musically, of the whole work? Or that of doing away with the end of the opening scene, thereby spoiling the beautiful musical architecture of the scene and sacrificing valuable elements of characterization? Elements that are, in fact, indispensible to show the spirit of the cheering in the coronation scene; for instance, the conclusion of the discussion: "If we must shout, no matter where we shout—all the same to us!" Did not one of his friends realize how deplorable such cuts were? Stassof refers as follows to one minor order of alteration introduced, apparently, during the rehearsals in 1873:

> In the choral scenes Mussorgsky often introduced passages for solo voices; for instance, in the opening scene, the sentences "Mitiukh, why do we shout?", "A tsar must be found to govern Russia", among others, and also a number in the revolution scene. But it pleased my

> lord the conductor [Napravnik] to have them sung by groups of choristers. Under the influence of the man upon whom so much depended, Mussorgsky, who in practical matters was at times far too pliant and submissive, agreed to this deplorable suggestion—exactly as Glinka, thirty years earlier, had agreed to the alteration of the best things in his *Ruslan and Liudmila* and—again like Glinka—he allowed the altered forms to appear in the printed edition of his opera. O how incomprehensible the Russian lack of character!

The same is certainly true of many of the major alterations: but apparently this never occurred either to Stassof or to anybody else until half a century later.

Golenishchef-Kutuzof's recollections of Mussorgsky strike a contrasting note. He wrote them down in 1888, but they appeared in 1935 only.[31] It is necessary, when considering them, to remember that he had an axe to grind. He himself confesses as much quite frankly. He was a sworn enemy of radicalism in art as well as in politics. He objected to Stassof's description of Mussorgsky as a revolutionist and realist in art, and accuses him of having persuaded the composer to follow a policy alien to his true nature. He loathed the peasant scenes in *Boris*, all the peasant songs in Mussorgsky's output, and even humorous songs such as 'The He-Goat' or 'The Seminarist'. Accordingly, he set out to show that his friend was really an idealist, who now and then had gone astray under the influence of pernicious advice. He held, like most people, that realism was the cult of the lowly and unpleasant. He honestly believed that Mussorgsky was more of a realist when dealing with the rogue Varlaam than when dealing with Tsar Boris: of all *Boris* it was the Polish act that appealed to him most. He declared that Mussorgsky's musical ideas, in their first flower, were always beautiful, but that he deliberately spoilt them when committing them to paper, because of his 'radical' attitude.

He has an amazing story to tell about the cuts practised in *Boris* when it was first produced: that Mussorgsky—the true, sensible Mussorgsky whom Stassof was ever trying to extirpate—found no praise high enough for the wisdom displayed by Napravnik in chopping off one portion of *Boris* after another, was delighted that the whole scene in the cell should have been cut out and thoroughly approved of the excision of the parrot episode, the chiming clock and so on: "All this, Mussorgsky used to tell me, is quite impossible on the stage. 'But those gentlemen [Stassof and his group] simply won't listen to reason. They want quantity, not quality. They say I am infirm of purpose. They simply can't understand that the composer of an opera cannot finally judge of the effectiveness of scenes until he actually sees them on the stage. Did not Meyerbeer practise remorseless cuts at rehearsals? And he was a man who knew what he was about!' "

We may wonder whether Golenishchef-Kutuzof, in his eagerness to place Mussorgsky on a pedestal of the right kind, has not overreached himself. But, however strange his statements may be, we have no right to wave them aside, we must test and assess them with the remainder of the evidence.

When, as on this particular point, confirmatory evidence is lacking on either side, all we can do is to resort to conjecture. There is no reason to doubt Golenishchef-Kutuzof's veracity, nor even, in the main, the faithfulness of his memory. He says that he himself did not agree with Mussorgsky in this particular matter, whatever his feelings as to the dramatic or musical value of the suppressed passages may have been. The discussions he undoubtedly had with him must have helped to fix things in his mind.

Indeed the recollections show that the two—who genuinely believed in one another—used to indulge in lively bouts of controversy. As Keldysh points out in his commentary, Mussorgsky, under the influence of some mood of the moment, may at times have let fall statements that did not express carefully considered judgments. We may suppose that temporary excitement caused by Napravnik's arguments (whom one cannot help suspecting of having adduced the example of Meyerbeer) might account for his readiness to approve of the omission of the scene in the cell, never marking that this meant the Pretender's appearing out of the blue in the inn scene, unaccounted for, intelligible only to those who had the story at their finger-tips.

It is easy enough to admit that when the revolution scene was cut out in turn, he should have remarked: "This is all to the good, not only from the point of view of dramatic fitness, but from that of my own conscience. In that scene, for the first and only time in my life, I misrepresented the Russian people. They might wish to punish, and even kill an enemy, but they would never torture and deride him." This is exactly the kind of thing we can imagine him saying, and believing at the moment (it was in 1876, at a time when he was more than ever idealizing the Russian people).

But none of these conjectures enables us to imagine him entertaining, upon mature reflexion, a desire to justify without the slightest restriction the appalling mutilation of his masterpiece. Admitting, nevertheless, that Golenishchef-Kutuzof's description of his frame of mind in 1873 and after is true in the main, an explanation may be found in his nature. Indeed, the study of his life, sayings, and works reveals that there were three separate and unrelated aspects to his personality: the inspired artist, who when at work forgot all about theories, including his own; the excitable, unbalanced talker and theorist, who at times had no clearer comprehension of his own creative self than of the work of other creators; and the restless seeker who, as soon as a work was finished—or even before, if the prospect of another one opened—lost interest in it. By 1872, when he began *Khovanshchina*, *Boris*, so far as he was concerned, was done with, and all his energies and hopes centred in the new task.

Nothing could be more characteristic in this respect than in the letter he wrote to Stassof on 2 January 1873, after hearing that *Boris Godunof* was to be produced at last, the following lines: "It is jolly to think that when we stand our trial with *Boris*, we shall be thinking of *Khovanshchina*, living *Khovanshchina*! We shall be told: 'You have infringed all laws divine and human', and reply: 'So we have!', mentally adding, 'And we shall infringe them again'. We shall be told 'You will be forgotten soon, and forever', and reply: 'No, no, and no!' "

This explanation, of course, does not touch the core of the matter: but the evidence available so far provides no decisive indication as to what his innermost feelings were.

Even nowadays, to weigh the two versions against one another is a heart-breaking problem. After we have admitted that the opening scene and the scene in the cell are preferable in their full form, and that the revolution scene is so overwhelming as to weigh the scales heavily in favour of the final version, countless points remain to be taken into account.

To begin with, the matter has to be considered from two almost unrelated points of view: the practical, matter-of-fact point of view of business interests, and the purely artistic point of view. From the former, it may be acknowledged that the initial version is too consistently gloomy, and that there is far greater variety in the final version, owing to the remodelling of the second act and the insertion of the Polish act. There is far more singing; and the polonaise enables producers who believe in the value of spectacle for its own sake to introduce a little dancing, as Diaghilef did in 1908.

Passing to the artistic point of view, it would be absurd to deny that most of this, in principle, is to the good. But as soon as we look deeper, complications arise. In the initial version, the tragedy lies wholly within the soul of Boris and in the fate of the people. Grigory, after he has become the Pretender, ceases to matter except as a symbol of the forces arrayed against Boris—the instrument set into motion by Pimen. In the final version, he cuts an insignificant and conventional figure throughout the third act, and it is only when he appears at the end of the revolution scene that he assumes importance. Boris, in the initial version, is strong and manly despite his grim forebodings. He thinks of his people and his responsibilities as a ruler rather than of his own fate. In the final version, he is seen sick, suspicious, and nerve-wracked from the moment when he appears in Act ii—the nurse, who was playing with Feodor, gives a shriek of surprise as she curtsies, and he mutters angrily: "Well, am I a wild beast and you a frightened hen?"

This difference need not necessarily be regarded as telling against the second conception: but in a drama in which the principal character plays so outstanding a part, the fact that this principal character should be of commanding stature has its value.

The following excerpts from the two versions of the monologue will illustrate the contrast:

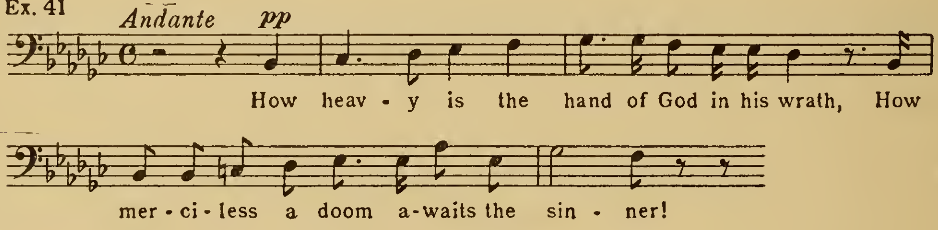
Oh, fools and dupes are we
Who, when we hear our people shout our praise,
Are moved to take a pride in idle power!
God raised His hand in wrath upon our land,
My people groan, my people die of hunger.
By my orders all were fed and clothed,
And gold I dealt out to all; provided work for many;
And yet the fools ignore my deeds and curse me.
Whenever fire destroys their hearths and homes,
Or when the storm tears down their wretched hovels,
Forthwith I have new homes for them erected,
I provide for all their wants, and I watch and I protect them.
But they lay blame on me for all that happens.
Thus am I judged! [This text is Pushkin's]

(*Lost in thought*)
How heavy is the hand of God in his wrath,

How merciless a doom awaits the sinner!
In gloom I tread, grim darkness surrounds me,
No single ray of light brings solace.
My heart is torn with anguish, is hopeless and weary.
Nought avails me.
(*In a whisper*)
A secret terror haunts me, I wait, I tremble,
With all my heart I implore saints and angels
And God I beseech to grant me mercy.
And I, I with all my power, Tsar of Russia,
I, feared and envied, in tears I vainly beg for mercy.

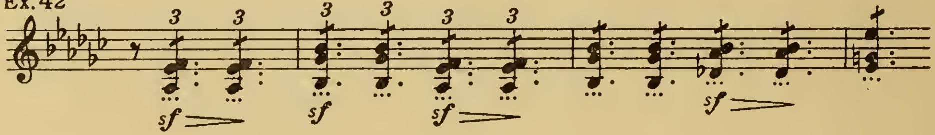
There are equally significant differences in the music. What was called, here, the 'anger' motive (Ex. 27) does not appear at all in the final version of the second act. On the other hand a smoother motive, taken from *Salammbô*,

Ex. 41


Andante
pp
How heav - y is the hand of God in his wrath, How
mer - ci - less a doom a-waits the sin - ner!

is used extensively in the monologue (vocal score, p. 188). So is what may be called the 'fear' motive:

Ex. 42



In the initial version it is first heard when Shuisky tells the Tsar: "The King, the nobles, the priests are on his side", and it plays but a small part afterwards. In the final version it is heard repeatedly in the dialogue with Shuisky: vocal score, p. 213, "Now, quickly, get to work!" *piano*—instead of the fierce, imperious music *fortissimo* in the initial version, pp. 143-4; and p. 214, instead of the harping iterations of the Dimitri motive (see *supra*, Ex. 21). The hallucination music, too, is used several times, instead of breaking out at the end of the scene only.

A good many of the alterations in the final version and of the cuts either therein or in the 1874 vocal score had the effect of reducing the number of thematic allusions or reappearances of the motives, e.g. the twenty-seven bar cut shown p. 334 of the vocal score. This may be mere accident, but it may also be the outcome of advice given by Mussorgsky's anti-Wagnerian friends (see *infra*, p. 177, the reference to Cui's article of 1874 on *Boris*).

Sometimes the result is to the good: in the final version the music when Shuisky describes his watch by Dimitri's body, based on new, non-thematic materials, is far more poetic and telling than that in the initial version, based on the Dimitri motive. In all such comparisons bearing on isolated points, judgment is bound to be very much a matter of personal feeling. For instance, the present writer holds that Xenia's lament is finer, more original, more poignant, in the initial version than in the final; but other critics, including Newman and Blom, have declared their preference for the second version. There are points, however, on which a more or less general agreement is likely.

The opening scene of Act ii, with the children's songs and play, is delightful and falls into place admirably. The same may be said of the parrot episode. Musically, all this belongs to Mussorgsky's best. The final version of the hallucination scene gains through being on a bigger scale. Not that it is longer: it is, in fact, shorter by one bar. But the scheme is broader and bolder. The fuller, more diversified scoring, the design and spacing of the vocal phrases, the added touches (and principally the clock with the chimes and puppets) greatly increase the effectiveness. Here, as in the revolution scene, Mussorgsky is a little more effusive, more inclined to give rein to his musical imagination.

The Polish act, from the dramatic point of view, is purely and simply an interlude. It serves to relieve the tension, and introduces a strong contrast—maybe, considering its length, too large a measure of contrast. It is all very well to say that it illustrates an important chapter in the story, but there remains to be considered how this is done. Nothing momentous happens in it. The characters are shown plotting against Boris, but all they actually do is to talk. That Rangoni, the Jesuit, should wish to secure a hold on the Pretender through Marina does not affect the issue any more than the nobleman's boasts:

> We shall bring our captives to your feet, sweet ladies!
> We shall put to flight Boris and all his armies!

Rangoni, however, is by far the most interesting character in the act. Far more than the flippant and ambitious Marina, or the love-sick Pretender, this grim figure (invented by Mussorgsky for the occasion, not taken from Pushkin's play) stirred his imagination strongly. Hence the music, whether it expresses Rangoni's ascetic nature and fanaticism (vocal score, pp. 245 ff., 267) or corroborates his calculated eloquence when he discourses on the power of passion and carnal pleasures (pp. 249 ff., 262 ff.), stands out for its vigour and originality, reaching the same high level in characterization as the music of the other acts.

The chorus of the maids of honour is a gem of its kind—music in a vein seldom encountered in Mussorgsky's output, light, graceful, dainty, poetic, most delicately wrought (the only other example is the song 'A Garden by the Don'). There are lovely things, too, in the garden scene—especially the beginning of the duet. The polonaise is bright and spirited. On the other hand, a good deal of the music of either scene is indifferent.

Comparing the two versions in the aggregate, we see that all the criticisms describing *Boris* as badly constructed apply to the final form only. The Polish act is loosely connected with the rest; and it is possible to displace the revolution scene for the simple reason that the Tsar does not appear in it. His death may be regarded as having occurred at any time during the Pretender's march on Moscow. So, in theory, there is no compulsion to show either scene first. If it is felt that the revolution scene embodies the real conclusion of the tragedy, and is even more soul-stirring than the Duma and death scene, the conclusion will naturally follow that to tamper with the order prescribed by Mussorgsky is absurd. Besides, no reason for so doing is conceivable, except the assumption that opera audiences cease to be interested from the moment the principal singer's fate is sealed.

Even before finishing the new version Mussorgsky started showing it to his friends. On 20 September 1871, Borodin informed his wife that the Polish act had been added, and the second act transformed. "All this", he remarked "is splendid". The next day he wrote: "How very fine *Boris* is now! Simply magnificent. I am convinced that if it is produced, it will carry the day. It is strange that it should impress musicians more favourably than Rimsky-Korsakof's *Maid of Pskof*. I did not expect this at all. Our Mitia [Borodin's half-brother, Dimitri Alexandrof] is wild with excitement." He reverted to *Boris* on 12 November: "Last Friday, the whole opera was played at the Purgolds' except for the last act. Wonderful."

Many such private readings took place during the autumn in the homes of Mussorgsky's friends—Shestakova's, the Purgolds', and others. Mussorgsky or Nadejda Purgold sat at the piano, and among the singers Stassof mentions with special praise Nadejda's sister, Alexandra. Two famous singers, Platonova and Komissarjevsky, sang excerpts at a party given by Lukashevitch, the head of the settings and costumes departments of the Imperial Theatres.

According to a letter of 25 October from Borodin to his wife, Balakiref disapproved, if not of *Boris* as a whole, at least of many things in it. After having explained that Balakiref was getting very difficult, and had been distressing or angering, by his growing indifference and by acrimonious criticisms, most of the members of the circle,* Borodin continues: "Modinka is offended by his unjust and arrogant remarks on *Boris*, bitingly and tactlessly uttered in the presence of people who certainly ought not to have heard them."

At the end of the winter, however, Balakiref agreed to perform the polonaise from the third act at a Free School of Music concert. The following note, which Mussorgsky wrote to him on 22 March, shows that he thought a modicum of precaution was advisable:

> If you, my very dear friend, find the Polonaise worthy of being performed at your concerts, I rejoice: and I have no objection to your putting it at the end of a programme: those members of the audience who really wish to hear it will remain. And for what I can read between the lines of your letter I thank you from the bottom of my heart. By performing the Polonaise you will do me a great service: it is necessary for me to hear my orchestration without the participation of the chorus. I have never had an opportunity to do so.

The performance took place on 3 April. On 5 February the coronation scene was given at a concert of the Russian Music Society, Napravnik conducting.

On 6 May, the committee of the Imperial Theatres examined the opera in its new version, and again rejected it. The matter was reconsidered in the autumn; the verdict remained unchanged. The situation seemed hopeless; but some of Mussorgsky's friends took the matter in hand. At a meeting that took place at the Purgolds' home, Gennadi Kondratief, a singer (who later became stage-manager in chief of the Petersburg Opera), decided that the programme of his benefit performance, to take place on 5 February, would include three scenes from *Boris*. Lukashevitch gave his warm support, and after having encouraged Kondratief to take the momentous decision, he greatly promoted the success of the venture by the excellent work he put into preparing the production.

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* At that time, Balakiref was very much depressed and embittered in consequence of his long and unsuccessful struggles against difficulties of all kinds. Soon afterwards a breakdown in his energies, physical and mental, led to his temporary retirement from the musical world[6]. But to the end of his life he found much to criticise in *Boris*.

Thus did it come to pass that the public career of *Boris Godunof* began, without official sanction, on the stage of the Marinsky Theatre on 5 February 1873, a curious point being that Tsar Boris did not appear in any of the three scenes selected—the inn scene and the whole Polish act.

The cast consisted of Kondratief (Rangoni), Platonova (Marina), Petrof (Varlaam), Leonova (the Hostess) and Komissarjevsky (the Pretender); Napravnik conducted, acquitting himself of the task brilliantly, although there had been two rehearsals only.*

According to all testimonies, it was a triumph for Mussorgsky. Rimsky-Korsakof records that "the three scenes took the audience by storm. Mussorgsky rejoiced, and so did we all. After the show, he, Stassof, my sister-in-law, Alexandra and others assembled at our house. At supper we drank champagne to the speedy production and success of the whole *Boris*. The *Peterburgskaya Gazeta* said: "After the inn scene, the composer had to take six calls. This is all the more remarkable considering that *The Stone Guest*, *Ratcliffe*, Serof's *Power of Evil* and *The Maid of Pskof* when first produced, did not quite fall flat, but were received without favour."

The *Peterburgsky Listok* proclaimed that "the only people to be astonished at the success would be those who had failed to recognize the work's merit and refused to produce it." Laroche, the very influential critic of the *Golos*, who a year later was to inveigh against *Boris* mercilessly—and who disliked Mussorgsky's "childish, clumsy, cacophonic" songs, declared that he had been amazed by the beauty of two of the excerpts. He did not like the first scene of the Polish act, but found no fault with the inn scene and the scene by the fountain. Of the former he wrote: "A splendid study in the comic genre. The musical characterization of Varlaam, of the Hostess, of the police officer, shows the composer's sense of individual expressions—a very rare quality. In the Kazan song, both the melody and the orchestral variations betoken rare power, and the harmony is plastic and brilliant—the very last thing I expected from Mr. Mussorgsky." And of the latter: "It is instinct with poetic beauty and softness of a kind not to be found in any of Mr. Mussorgsky's published compositions. All three scenes, but especially this one, are beautifully scored. The composer has probably devoted much time and labour to studying orchestration. Why did he not do the same for harmony and counterpoint?"

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* The next day Mussorgsky wrote to him a letter in which his delight and gratitude were expressed in hyperbolic terms. This, Andreï Rimsky-Korsakof remarks,[4] may have been partly diplomacy, eagerness to win over the man who might have the last say in the matter of producing *Boris*. Mussorgsky was aware that Napravnik disapproved of *Boris* for aesthetic reasons; but he was capable of disinterestedly and objectively appreciating Napravnik's qualities and activities. In 1876 when there was a danger of Napravnik's contract with the Imperial Theatres not being renewed, he was greatly worried. When the danger was averted, he wrote to Shestakova, "Thank God, Russian opera is saved".

Among those who expressed unfavourable opinions, Solovief was the most hostile. He described Mussorgsky's aims as unhealthy and inartistic, granting, however, that the composer had a sense of dramatic effects—but purely external effects, never achieved by simple, straightforward means. The music, he said, was clumsy and discordant, the scoring better but uneven. The composer, through his ignorance and desire to be new and egregious at all cost, achieved barbaric, hideous results.

Cui began his notice in the *Sankt Peterburgskye Viedomosti* by proclaiming that never had a composer received such ovations at the Marinsky Theatre. The inn scene, he said, was a masterpiece, written in the style of *The Stone Guest* and worthy of comparison with *The Stone Guest* (to his mind, the acme of praise). In the Polish act he found many merits, and not a few shortcomings. Generally speaking, he averred, Mussorgsky thought too much of dramatic truth and far too little of the quality of his music.

Thus, at the very outset, before *Boris* had been heard in full, the position was what it remained for nearly half a century: on the one hand, admiration aroused by the beauty and power of the work; on the other hand, objections to the composer's allegedly incorrect, and certainly unconventional methods and style. But the production of the three scenes was to have far-reaching consequences.

The first was that Bessel, the publisher, decided to bring out the vocal score of *Boris*. On 3 May, Mussorgsky wrote to Stassof: "Dear, glorious, most glorious *Généralissime!* Great news! 'Fomka!

Epikhan! Stand by, all of you!' [a line in the revolution scene] Great news! I am thoroughly happy! I am in a mood to talk, write and behave foolishly. Thanks to you, dear friend, the work dear to both of us is saved." On the 16th, Stassof received another excited note: "My wonderful *Généralissime*, do not await me for dinner. I must go to Bessel's to set *Boris* in order for publication. It is urgent. Await me at 9 p.m. or so." To Bessel Mussorgsky had written, two days earlier: "My reply to your letter of 2 May: here is the manuscript of *Boris*. I prepared it with all possible speed. We shall discuss terms, I suppose, in a few days and set down on paper that which we agreed upon verbally."

On 22 October he informed Bessel that the Director had decided to produce *Boris* and asked him to have the vocal score ready by the end of November. But it was only on 4 January 1874 that he finished reading the proofs and returned them, with a note which said: "Please send to Röder [the Leipzig engraver] one of the enclosed dedications according to your own choice. I should like it to be engraved in facsimile, and hope you will agree. Anyhow, please have my name appear in facsimile." This note was followed by another: "Please have the dedication in facsimile transferred so that it comes immediately after the title-page. Your activities fully entitle you to a share in it." No trace remains of the dedication in which Bessel was mentioned. One manuscript dedication, now in the Leningrad State Library, runs:

> I regard the people as one great being, inspired by one idea. This is my problem. I strove to solve it in this opera.
> To you all, who by your good advice and sympathy enabled me to see myself on the stage, I dedicate my work.
> M. Mussorgsky
> 21 January, 1874.

This too remained unused. In a few of the copies of the first edition of the vocal score the following dedication is printed:

> To you all, who by your kind words and sympathy gave me the possibility to accomplish the task that lay at the basis of the opera *Boris Godunof* I dedicate my work.
> M. Mussorgsky

A notice appeared in Bessel's periodical, the *Muzykalny Listok*, inviting subscriptions to the vocal score, the price to subscribers being ten silver roubles per copy. The list was to close on 1 January 1874, after which date the price would be fifteen roubles. So far as can be surmised, the score appeared on or about 15 January—that is, less than a fortnight before the first performance.

It is not possible to ascertain exactly how the Director came to change his mind. A few years after Mussorgsky's death, Platonova wrote to Stassof a long letter (he quoted from it in an article of 1886, entitled 'In memory of Mussorgsky', and the full text appeared in 1895,[2]) the substance of which was that in 1873 when the question of renewing her contract arose, she wrote to Gedeonof that she would not renew it unless it was made to include the stipulation that *Boris Godunof* would be produced for her benefit performance; and that after many picturesque episodes—including the calling of a special committee meeting—she carried the day because the management could not do without her.

According to Andreï Rimsky-Korsakof, the story (which looms large in all biographies of Mussorgsky written before 1932) is inaccurate in several respects. The letter Platonova wrote to Gedeonof (on 11 April 1873) is preserved in the archives of the theatre. She simply asked that a clause in her new contract should give her the right to have "a new opera" for her benefit performance. (This, it would seem, was not a new idea: the first performance of *The Maid of Pskof* had been given on her benefit night on 1 January of that very year 1873). But no such clause was inserted in her contract. Nor was a special committee meeting called in 1873 to reconsider the matter.

CHAPTER XII

BORIS GODUNOF ON THE STAGE

The Petersburg Opera and its public—Boris *splendidly produced but ruthlessly cut—Its triumphal success—Hostile critics—Cui's attack—History of* Boris *until Mussorgsky's death—Further cuts*

AT the time the situation, as regards native opera, was peculiar and unsatisfactory. There were in Petersburg two opera theatres. One, the Grand Theatre, was used for Italian opera only, with Adelina Patti and Christine Nilsson as star *prime donne.* At the other, the Marinsky, the repertory comprised, besides operas by foreign composers the most popular of which was Gounod's *Faust*, a small number of Russian operas, among which only Glinka's *A Life for the Tsar* and Serof's *Judith* and *Rogneda* had scored genuine success. Glinka's admirable *Ruslan and Liudmila* was slowly finding favour after a bad start in 1842. Dargomyjsky's operas and Cui's *Ratcliffe* had left the public cold. *The Maid of Pskof*, despite the mixed reception it had met with and the abuse poured on it by the Press, was playing to good houses and (Rimsky-Korsakof says in his Memoirs) was popular with a steadily increasing number of students and young people generally. The number of new operas produced year in, year out, was not great, as the following list will show:

1860	Rossini's *Otello*
1862	Meyerbeer's *Huguenots*; Verdi's *Forza del destino*
1863	Serof's *Judith*
1867	Kashperof's *The Tempest*
1868	Gluck's *Orfeo* (actually the first Petersburg performance); Napravnik's *The Nijni-Novgorodians*; Verdi's *Traviata*; Wagner's *Lohengrin*
1869	Gounod's *Faust*; Cui's *Ratcliffe*
1870	Moniuszko's *Halka*
1871	Serof's *Hostile Power*; Thomas's *Mignon*
1872	Dargomijsky's *The Stone Guest*

1873 Gounod's *Mireille*; Rimsky-Korsakof's *The Maid of Pskof*

The public was essentially one of dilettanti whose interest centred almost exclusively on *bel canto* and on Italian opera. One testimony to that effect may be quoted: that of the playwright Tikhonof:

> In those days, splendid performances of Russian operas were given, but the attendance was generally poor. Maybe the repertory was not to the public taste. Maybe our native singers were less popular than the Italians, especially the ladies. Anyhow, to attend the Russian opera was not fashionable. At the first performance of *The Maid of Pskof* there was a good deal of protest. An energetic campaign was being waged against 'the music of the future'—that is, that of the 'mighty handful'. Splendid artists such as Petrof, Melnikof and Lavrovskaya often sang to half-empty halls (*Istoritchesky Viestnik*, 1898)

The first performance of *Boris* took place on 27 January 1874—not 24 January, as said and repeated by various authors on the strength of a misprint in the first edition of the biography of Stassof. The cast was:

Boris Godunof	Melnikof
Grigory (the Pretender)	Komissarjevsky
Varlaam	Petrof
Pimen	Vassilief I
Shuisky	Vassilief II
Marina	Platonova
Xenia	(Mrs.) V. Raab
The Nurse	Schroeder
Rangoni	Paletchek
Stchelkalof	Sobolef
Missail	Dinjikof
The Hostess	Abarinova
The Simpleton	Bulakhof
The Police Officer	Sariotti
Mitiukh	Liadof
The Boyar in attendance	Sobolef
The Boyar Khrushchef	Matveief
The Two Jesuits	Vassilief I and Sobolef

Napravnik conducted: the producer was Kondratief

The settings were those designed by two specialists of repute, Shishkof and Botcharof, for a production of Pushkin's *Boris Godunof* in 1870—when, Stassof tells us, they had been so greatly admired that the designers had to take calls on the stage. According to Yakoulef[42] both were progressive 'for the period'. Shishkof's designs have been preserved, and show that "his settings, although conventional, were conscientiously and indeed brilliantly conceived and executed". The work was cut down ruthlessly, the whole scene in the cell being left out (probably for fear of the State censorship) and the third and fourth acts considerably shortened. The information given in one journal *Vsiemirnaya Illustratsia* (2 February 1874), that "the hall was sold out four days before the first performance, despite the nearly triple prices" suggests that keen interest had been aroused.

The success with the public was enormous, as even Mussorgsky's most relentless opponents acknowledged. There were, unavoidably, a few dissenters. Press notices were far less favourable than they had been the previous year. In the *Birjevye Viedomosti* Solovief's article was one long unqualified indictment. It described Mussorgsky as a clumsy and misguided imitator of Dargomyjsky and *Boris* as a "cacophony in four acts". Laroche in the *Golos* was less sweeping. He found Mussorgsky ignorant and clumsy, but gifted, independent, capable of genuine originality. In many parts of *Boris* he saw coarse, clumsy imitation of Serof. Mussorgsky, he alleged, was so ill equipped for composition that if denied access to a piano, he would forthwith cease to be a composer.

In Bessel's *Muzykalny Listok* Famyntsin denounced the music as disorderly and shapeless. The scoring he found satisfactory in certain respects, and he praised the recitatives. If the harmonic style, the part-writing, and here and there the scoring were overhauled, the opera, he added, would prove acceptable, for it embodied a praiseworthy ideal. He expressed regret that the scene in the cell and the parrot episode should have been cut out. In the *Muzykalny Sviet* two articles appeared: one by the editor, Makarof, and the other by an unidentified writer signing himself 'Orfei'. Both declared that *Boris* was inferior to Serof's operas. Makarof grudgingly acknowledged Mussorgsky's sense of dramatic effect. 'Orfei' paid a moderately warm tribute to his progressive tendencies and originality. Rapoport in the *Russky Mir* described him as gifted but misguided, and his music as "noisy, chaotic, conceived and carried out on a puny scale". In Dostoevsky's periodical the *Grajdanin* three articles by Strakhof (not a musician, but a fairly well-known author and a sworn foe of realism in art) appeared in the form of letters to the editor. Strakhof regarded *Boris* as an unexampled monstrosity, a hotch-potch of all the conflicting elements that characterize the Russian mind: "Think of our crass ignorance and illiteracy; of our sense of music and song; of our repudiation of art and our live artistic instinct; of our love for the people and contempt of the people; of our bold endeavour to achieve originality and our slavish submission to the narrowest theories; of our talent and our sterility, our lack of artistic imagination. All that is present, and the outcome is chaos."

The most favourable notice was that which appeared in the *Peterburgsky Listok* under the signature 'Foma Pizzicato'—the pseudonym, according to Andreï Rimsky-Korsakof, of the musical critic Baskin. Like several other critics, he failed to perceive the tragic significance of certain comic episodes, and even of the Simpleton, incredible as it may seem; and this led him to declare in all earnestness that Mussorgsky might some day occupy in Russian music a place similar to Auber's in French music.[37] But he extolled Mussorgsky's originality and power. Speaking of the part of Tsar Boris, he said: "dramatization in music can go no further. The composer reveals himself as a philosopher among musicians and has a rare gift for expressing the psychology of his subject". Alone among the critics of the time, he praised Mussorgsky's musical knowledge, command of the orchestra, fluency of diction, and fine choral writing. This article must have counterbalanced César Cui's in the *Sankt Peterburgskye Viedomosti.* It was as hostile as his article of 1873 had been.

The libretto, it said, was feeble, consisting of scenes so loosely connected that their order could be changed and some of them left out. Mussorgsky was so deficient in the capacity to compose instrumental music that he had elected to start without a prelude. The first scene was fine, the coronation very poor. The cutting out of the scene in the cell was justified, most of it being poor in musical substance. Mussorgsky was too fond of crude tone-painting and of limning details. He had borrowed from Wagner the cheap method of characterization by leitmotives. The inn scene was fine. The first part of Act ii contained many beauties, but practically all that followed upon the parrot scene (which Cui described as "the acme of perfection") was feeble. There were many weaknesses in the Polish act. The first part of the fourth act was marred by crude tone-painting and puny imitative effects. The death scene was masterly, the revolution scene likewise. But, had Mussorgsky been less deficient in capacity for working out, he could have done far better in the central choral section. The conclusion ran:

> Mr. Mussorgsky is endowed with great and original talent but *Boris* is an immature work, superb in parts, feeble in others. Its main defects are in the disjointed recitatives and the disarray of the musical ideas. At times the music sounds like a mere potpouri. These defects are not due to lack of creative power. Far from it: remember the two scenes of the people, the inn scene—how melodic and characteristic, how natural and flowing the musical discourse is! The real trouble is his immaturity, his incapacity for severe self-criticism, his self-satisfaction and his hasty methods of composition—akin to those which Messrs. Rubinstein and Tchaikovsky [Cui's pet abominations] follow with such deplorable results. Let us hope that in his next opera, he will steer clear of those errors and display nothing but his rare gifts.

All in all, these articles express the views that were to prevail for nearly half a century. All critics agreed as to the poverty of his technique, except 'Foma Pizzicato', then an unknown *débutant* whose utterances were unlikely to carry much weight (and were, moreover, not supported by any kind of argument). The notion that *Boris* required correcting and remodelling crops up in Famyntsin's notice. In Strakhof's it is not difficult to discern the expression (maybe unconscious) of the feeling of certain Russians who were ashamed of Mussorgsky's music because it was so thoroughly and exclusively Russian—exactly as in 1842 many people had dismissed Glinka's *Ruslan and Liudmila* as "mere cabman's music". Laroche's summed up views prevalent in official circles and Famyntsin's represented the more literal outlook of narrow-minded theorists.

Hostile critics naturally made capital out of Cui's verdict. Solovief likened Cui to Brutus rising against Caesar who was attempting to wreck the republic. Laroche declared that he must have felt compelled to speak the truth, and so had become the clique's most dangerous enemy, and Strakhof pointed out that the opera had displeased even the people who were prejudiced in its favour.

Mussorgsky, who until then "had believed in Cui stupidly and blindly" (as Vladimir Stassof wrote to his brother Dimitri on

23 August 1873), was cruelly hurt. He may not have cared two pins what other critics had said, but this was altogether another matter. It hurt him all the more for the reason that Cui also referred, in deliberately malevolent terms, to an unpleasant incident that had taken place on the first night. A small group of lady admirers had sent a laurel wreath for presentation to Mussorgsky on the stage; but this public tribute was not allowed to take place. The ladies complained in a letter to the *Sankt Peterburgsky Viedomosti*, accusing Napravnik of being responsible for the prohibition. Mussorgsky, in the same journal, protested against this accusation, stating that "not feeling so audacious as to accept a pathetic homage on the occasion of the first performance of his first opera, he himself had suggested that the wreath should not be presented until the audience had left the hall, when the presentation took place in one of the green-rooms". (The truth apparently is that the wreath, together with three others which had also been intercepted, was carried to his home by Mrs. Stassova.) He also expressed his regret at the incident in a private letter to Napravnik. And to Stassof he wrote, the next morning: "My dear *Généralissime*, I implore you, do not print the story in the Press. The consequences might be the very last thing you would wish to happen: the withdrawal of *Boris*. I beseech you for the sake of all the love you bear me." But both Cui and Laroche commented on the affair with ponderous irony, and possibly Stassof was not as discreet as Mussorgsky had implored him to be, for Mussorgsky wrote to him a week later:

> My dear *Généralissime*, *always dear*, *despite everything and everybody*. I was angry, as a wicked woman in love might be. I despaired and fumed . . . now I am sad and indignant, indignant and sad. How horrible Cui's article is! No educated man should ever dare to behave with women as he has with his thoughtless jests. Shame to him who, publicly, in print, derides women whose bold move has elicited, I hear, nothing but sympathy. What I myself feel is another matter: I keep silence and shall not forget this kind deed of his. In my anger against you—you, my friend who did not heed my prayer—I was brutal . . . the devil take polite small talk. I was unkind to you at the theatre, yet I declare proudly that neither at supper at Dimitri's [Stassof's brother's] house, nor even at the theatre, was I mean, nor did I belittle your love for me. I repeat it: whatever happens, I cannot tear myself away from you; I love you strongly, and your face suddenly grown pale showed me that your love for me is equally strong. I am glad of our

bond: it has strengthened and encouraged me—for people to join issue thus is good, is significant. Now I have told you all, and I stand before you as I am.

So, maybe, *Boris* had to be produced for me to see myself and see other people too. The tone of Cui's article is hateful! How rashly he inveighs against my 'self-satisfaction'. The brainless fellow is not content with my always having been humble and diffident, as I shall remain so long as my brains do not wither. This senseless onslaught, this deliberate lie renders me blind: it is as if a wave of soapy water had arisen, covering everything.—*Self-satisfaction!!! Precipitate methods! Immaturity!* Whose? Whose? . . . I'd like to know.

Well: a woman who loves feels, on the strength of various portents, the coming of any danger that may threaten her beloved. You often said: "I fear Cui with regard to *Boris*". Your loving intuition was right. And after such a *thunderbolt* of a proof of your love, could I cease to love you?!! *Vade retro, Satanas!*

The effect of the Press notices upon the public was not great. The dilettanti may have found in them the confirmation of their indignant feelings. The younger generation was and remained enthusiastic, not only for the music but also on account of the democratic spirit of many scenes, and especially the revolution scene. Stassof describes the young people cheering wildly and singing through the streets the choral portions of the work.

His statement that "twenty performances took place to crowded houses" is not accurate. Yakovlef's investigations[40] establish that, in 1874, *Boris* was given ten times to full houses, twice to nearly full houses, once to a good house, and once to a house one-third empty. The average takings were 1,985 roubles against 2,085, that year, for *Ruslan and Liudmila*; 1,768 for *A Life for the Tsar*; 1,847 for Gounod's *Faust*; and 1,443 for *The Maid of Pskof*. In 1875 two performances took place, both to practically full houses; in 1876 another two with fair takings. It was mercilessly cut down for the occasions, the opening scene and the revolution scene being left out, so that the only scenes given were: the coronation, the inn, the Tsar's apartments, the two scenes of the Polish act, and the Council and death. It was rumoured that the Court disapproved of the opera, especially of the revolution scene.

In 1877 there were five performances, and the takings gradually dwindled. There was one performance in 1878; Mussorgsky attended and had to take several calls. The takings were good. In February 1879—a couple of weeks after the scene in the cell had been given its first performance at a Free School of Music concert, Rimsky-Korsakof conducting—*Boris* was given its last performance during Mussorgsky's lifetime. The takings nearly reached the maximum. Thus twenty-one performances took place within almost exactly five years—a fairly satisfactory number, considering the management's hostility and the advanced character of the work. Of all the operas performed during the same period, only *Ruslan and Liudmila* and Rubinstein's *The Demon* showed equally good average takings.

On 11 December 1881, nine months after Mussorgsky's death, the twenty-second performance took place, to a full house. Another four were given in 1882, and that year on 8 November, by decree of the Committee, *Boris* was withdrawn from the repertory.

CHAPTER XIII

1874–1881

The Pictures from an Exhibition—*The work on* Khovanshchina *and* The Sorotchintsi Fair—*Nadejda Opotchinina's death—Leonova—Mussorgsky unable to resist his dipsomania—Ups and downs—The song-set* Sunless—*Fresh disquisitions on art—The Naumof family—Decline in his capacity for work—Money difficulties increase—Concert tour with Leonova—Help from friends—He vainly tries to work at both his operas jointly—Final collapse and death*

WITH the production of *Boris*, Mussorgsky scored the one great public triumph—not unmixed, but still very real—in his career. It came, alas! at a time when dipsomania had taken hold of him for good. He must have done his utmost to put up a fight, and it seems that he succeeded, at least temporarily.

For a while it may have seemed as though he had entirely regained his self-control. All through the winter and spring of 1874 he was busily at work, carrying on with *Khovanshchina* and (in May) beginning the song-set *Sunless*. In June, Stassof having organized a commemorative exhibition of Hartmann's designs and paintings, it occurred to him to pay tribute to his friend's memory by composing a piano suite, *Pictures from an Exhibition*. He carried the work through speedily. " Hartmann is seething", he wrote to Stassof in June, "as *Boris* was. Sounds and ideas float in the air and my scribbling can hardly keep pace with them". The suite was finished on 22 June. It consisted of ten pieces, each of them inspired by one of the exhibits, with a prelude entitled 'Promenade' the music of which reappears several times in the shape of interludes: its main motive also appears in two of the pieces, 'Catacombae' and 'The Knights' Gate at Kief'. In this 'Promenade', Mussorgsky explained to Stassof,[1] he had evoked himself "roving through the exhibition, now leisurely, now briskly in order to come close to a picture that had attracted his attention, and at times sadly, thinking of his departed friend." The whole suite, the most important of his instrumental compositions after *A Night on the Bare Mountain*, is an attractive but not particularly significant work.

In July, unexpectedly—and not very wisely considering the importance of the task he had undertaken in *Khovanshchina*—he suddenly decided to compose a comic opera on the subject of one of Gogol's Ukrainian tales, *The Sorotchintsi Fair*. To his friend Liubov Karmalina (she was the wife of a staff officer, and a gifted singer, keenly interested in the work of the group, and she was helping Mussorgsky to find traditional chants of the Old Believers for use in *Khovanshchina*) he explained:

> A voice from the air has been calling "heave to!" and *Khovanshchina* must wait. This will mean husbanding my creative powers well. Two heavyweights such as *Boris* and *Khovanshchina* in succession might prove too much. And the comic opera will have the advantage of providing different characters and a different setting. The elements of Ukrainian songs are so little known that incompetent experts regard these songs as counterfeits (counterfeits of *what*?). And these songs are available in great numbers so my work is cut out: may I have the needful strength and wisdom. Meanwhile, *Khovanshchina* will not lie fallow. But the moods of creative fancy are elusive, more fickle than the most fickle of coquettes: when they come one must seize them, and unreservedly yield to their erratic dictates.

But the principal reason was, no doubt, his longing to devise a fine big part for his friend Petrof, the singer, his admiration and love for whom had been developing steadily ever since the performance of scenes from *Boris*. He did not realize that the task of composing two operas jointly (for this was bound to be the outcome of the "erratic dictates" of his fancy) would be the reverse of economy of creative power—would inevitably prove too much for him. Obviously, he was in a buoyant frame of mind, and teeming with musical ideas. *Sunless*, the greater part of which he composed between May and August (the opening number was composed in November only), represents a peak in his output. But the craving for drink soon got hold of him again.

Maybe one of the reasons was a cruel blow that had suddenly struck him: on 29 June his beloved friend Nadejda Opotchinina died, at the age of fifty-three. How great his distress was will never be known. Not a reference to her death appears in his correspondence, nor is there any record of his having spoken of it to any of his friends. But to her memory he paid a heartfelt tribute in a 'Funeral Epistle' for voice and piano which he started composing the very same day. The text is in the form of a personal address: "Few people realized the sweetness of your soul . . . after my beloved mother's death, when disaster overcame me and left me lonely, helpless and bitter, with you I found sanctuary and solace. . . ." The music, simple and poignant, is in style and character closely related to that of *Boris Godunof* and especially to the Chancellor and the Pimen music.

He left the song—if not actually unfinished, as is said by all the Russian critics—without a formal ending, and never took steps to have it performed or published. The manuscript was discovered many years after his death.

According to Rimsky-Korsakof:[15]

> The year 1874 may be regarded as marking the beginning of his downfall, one of the main causes of which was the initial success of *Boris*, which increased his self-esteem, and its gradual collapse despite the favour it found with the public. Vladimir Stassof used to praise him unreasonably, and was forever putting him on his mettle. Inferior people, his boon companions, extolled him too; and on the other hand, he was irritated by the attacks of Laroche, Rostislav, and others, and annoyed even by the reasonable criticisms of his friends and colleagues. He sought our company more seldom, became taciturn and supercilious. His way of expressing himself, which had always been obscure and complicated, became inordinately so. He would spend whole nights drinking hard at the Malo-Yaroslavets restaurant, alone or with new acquaintances unknown to us all. When dining with us or his other old friends, he nearly always refused wine, but he made up for this abstemiousness after having left.

All this is unsympathetic in tone, and also far too summary. Rimsky-Korsakof would probably have been less harsh, and less ready to ascribe his friend's misfortune to wounded vanity had he known that the influence of the School for Cadets was the initial cause. Kompaneisky's revelations appeared long after this portion of the Memoirs had been written; and Mussorgsky, it will be remembered, did not care to speak of his years of youth (see *supra*, p. 19). Rimsky-Korsakof also seems to have been unaware of the crisis of 1873: at least, it may be noted that no letters referring to the matter passed between him and Stassof that year. One thing, however, is clear: all he has to say on the bare facts is true.

It is difficult to determine how much of his description refers to 1874. The decline, as he himself says, was gradual. The year before, Mussorgsky, in his guarded avowal to Pauline Stassova, had assured her that the musician in him remained unaffected. He was wrong, alas. From that time on, inspiration continued to come to him freely now and then, as fresh and pure and far-reaching as ever: but his power for sustained and co-ordinated labour (acquired only a few years before in 1863 or so) was certainly impaired. He would no longer have been capable of a prolonged spell of hard work, such as he had put in when composing *Boris* and when remodelling it. Moreover, his health gradually became poorer. He suffered at various times from throat trouble and bronchitis, aggravated, it is said, by heavy smoking. To Liudmila Shestakova (to whom several times during the autumn he gave good news of his progress with *Khovanshchina*) he wrote, on 27 November: "I feel terribly weary owing to my office work. *Khovanshchina* goes well, but I have little time, and get very tired."

In effect, during the seven years' span of life that remained to him, he turned out but little: *Khovanshchina*, nearly completed in vocal score form, but ill-balanced and shapeless, portions of *The Sorotchintsi Fair*, a small number of songs, the *Pictures from an Exhibition*, and a few trifling instrumental pieces.

It is true that a fair proportion of this meagre output is splendid music, *Sunless* especially. Three at least of the *Songs and Dances of Death* (the fourth is 'Field Marshal Death', impressive but more melodramatic and less outstandingly original) are admirable; and the finest things in *Khovanshchina* are thoroughly representative of the genius that informs *Boris Godunof*.

In certain respects his style continued to evolve, especially so far as regards melody, upon which he tried to concentrate more and more, on the one hand, studying, in view of *Khovanshchina*, the chants of the Old Believers and especially their expressive ornament, on the other hand striving to progress towards a modified form of realistic expression, and hoping to achieve a fusion of his dramatic style and his lyrical style from which he expected wonderful results. In the letter in which he informed Karmalina that *Khovanshchina* would have to wait, he had said: "The old tunes with which you so kindly supplied me show me that I am following the right line. I fully understand the grace-notes, the *gruppetti*, so to speak: *unisono* or in octaves, all this will ring wonderfully true." And to Stassof on 25 December 1876, he wrote: "In *Boris* I gave scenes from the life of the people. Now I foresee a new kind of melody: the melody of life. With great pains I have achieved a new type of melody evolved from speech, and fused recitative and melody together. I should like to call the result well-thought-out, justified melody. Some day, the ineffable song will arise, intelligible to one and all. If I succeed I shall stand as a conqueror in art; and succeed I must."

Sunless represents a step in that direction. It contains many examples of extremely supple and lyrical melody, standing half-way between the melodic recitative style of *Boris* (very different, let it be remembered, from Dargomyjsky's in which the melodic quality is provided by song elements diverted from their natural destination) and pure cantilena. The set also shows a marked advance in the matter of rare, sublimated harmonies, without ever a trace of roughness. In *The Sorotchintsi Fair*, on the contrary (except for the new version of *A Night on the Bare Mountain* which is used in it), and in many portions of *Khovanshchina*, the main interest is in the melody, the harmonic treatment being quite simple, and at times rudimentary.

Of these points, all things considered, not one is of fundamental importance. Mussorgsky, despite his dreams and his efforts, did not come any closer to his ideals than he had done in *Boris*. Nor did any changes take place, or new features appear, in his psychological make-up during this last period of his life. So that from this point on, the biographer's task becomes appreciably simpler.

There is no need, for instance, to try to find out what, under more favourable circumstances, *Khovanshchina* might have been, by laboriously studying and comparing all that he told his friends about his plans for it and the portions he had composed or outlined, ultimately deciding to leave them out for some reason or other—one of these reasons being that he never succeeded in building up a really co-ordinated libretto, and another, that, as said by Karatyghin,[16] he tried to cram into it stuff, the adequate treatment of which would have required a trilogy.

Nor need we seek in his letters indications of undercurrents which, if they existed at all, exercised no action upon his life and work, or of germs not one of which was to prove fruitful: his evolution as man and artist had run its course.

As already mentioned, he soon reverted to *Khovanshchina*. On 20 April 1875 he informed Karmalina that he had decided not to proceed with *The Sorotchintsi Fair.* "A Great Russian cannot pretend to be a Little Russian. I cannot master Little Russian recitative."

But he did not succeed in keeping away from it. He started work afresh on it in 1876, and later at various times. During the concert tour that he undertook with Daria Leonova in 1879, excerpts from it were given before Ukrainian audiences; and the music, he wrote to Stassof, was found thoroughly Ukrainian—which further encouraged him to carry on with it while still wrestling with *Khovanshchina.*

The year 1875 was, on the whole, a well-filled one. Before the end of the winter Bessel announced the forthcoming publication of *Sunless.* In February, Mussorgsky began the *Songs and Dances of Death*, the first composed being the admirable 'Trepak'. On 13 February a charity concert in aid of needy medical students took place. "The accompanist", the bill said, "will be Mr. Mussorgsky". On 9 March he appeared in the same capacity at a similar affair. Kompaneisky's recollections of that period entirely confirm Rimsky-Korsakof's:

> Mussorgsky moved a good deal in aristocratic circles and was often asked to play and sing to audiences eager to behold the lion of the moment. Most of his hosts, instead of having the strength of character to restrain him, would think it their duty to ply him with the drink that was poison for him. He fared especially badly after *Boris* had been produced, when it became necessary to court popularity with influential people. Fame, too, went to his head, he drank too much at parties, and after the parties at the Malo-Yaroslavets restaurant. He was also in great request as an accompanist at students' concerts. The students worshipped him. And so, day after day, he squandered his energies and wrecked his health.

On 5 March he was appointed senior head-clerk in his department, which goes to show that his work was still giving satisfaction. Some kind of trouble arose later in the year, however, for in December he complained to Liudmila Shestakova of "a vulgar little intrigue against him at the office".

On 2 August he informed her that the first act of *Khovanshchina* was finished. On the 7th he gave the same news to Stassof:

> I am now tackling the second act. Hard is the task you have set me, but I must carry on. I cried "Towards new shores!" and there can be no turning back. How many new worlds and new aspects of life reveal

themselves! They bewitch me, make me long to understand them, to possess them. They are difficult of access, one approaches them with awe: but when one gets close to them, one musters courage, and all is well. I have seen Rimsky-Korsakof. He has turned out sixteen fugues, each more complicated than the last—and that's all! When will those people instead of turning out fugues and third acts, start reading sensible books and conversing with sensible persons? Or is it too late? Are they past curing? That kind of thing is not what humanity expects to find in art. It is not in that direction that the artist's duty lies: life, wherever it reveals itself; truth, however pungent; bold, sincere point-blank speech—these are my leaven, these are what I want and am aiming at.

On 19 October he denounced Cui and Rimsky-Korsakof even more angrily:

When I think of certain artists who dare not cross the barrier, I feel not merely distressed, but sickened. All their ambition is to distil, one by one, carefully measured drops of prettiness. A real man would be ashamed of so doing. Devoid of wisdom and will-power, they entangle themselves in the bonds of tradition. The worst is that they had begun by proudly raising a new flag 'to the glory of human society'. Held in Balakiref's iron grip, they breathed through his powerful lungs (but not as deep as his heroic breast did) and attempted tasks that might have caused stronger men to hesitate. When Balakiref's iron grip relaxed its hold, they felt tired, in need of rest. And where did they seek rest? In tradition, of course: "As our forbears did, so shall we do!" They laid down the glorious flag of war, they hid it carefully behind seven doors with seven locks. Then they rested and had a good rest. Without flag, without ambitions, not looking and not wishing to look ahead, they labour at things done long before, which nobody requires from them. Now and then voices of ducks from the mud-pond arise in praise of them. And how could they fail to be praised? The 'mighty handful' have degenerated into soulless traitors. Their scourge has become a toy whip. Even in cloud-cuckoo-land you would not expect to find artists so indifferent to the essence of life, so useless to contemporary art.

Rimsky-Korsakof[15] says that Mussorgsky had started to regard him with suspicion simply because of his systematic study of harmony and counterpoint. But in another chapter he reveals that others too were dissatisfied with him, rightly or wrongly, at the moment. After Balakiref's retirement, he had taken charge of the Free School of Music; and his policy there, he says, was disapproved of by Balakiref, Stassof and also Cui. This may help to account for Mussorgsky's attitude; and also for the fact that Stassof in his reply to the above outburst, expressed his full approval: "Five hundred millions cheers for you, Mussorianin! I understand and love only such people as you, and from them only I expect great and enduring achievements. The great artist is not he who is an expert at composing fugues or drawing hands or feet, but he in whom truth grows and ripens, in whom a jealous eager feeling for genuineness in all things is ever at work"—an utterance that lends a colour to the view that Stassof, instead of restraining Mussorgsky, was forever goading him on.

In August, he ceased to share rooms with Golenishchef-Kutuzof because, to his indignation, the poet was about to get married. A temporary break took place, but eventually Mussorgsky reconciled himself to the situation and resumed friendly relations with the couple.

His next move was to take up quarters in the home of a friend of his, Paul Naumof. According to information collected by Andreï Rimsky-Korsakof, Naumof was a retired naval officer, married to a rich woman, Elizabeth Izmailovna (*née* Kostiurina). Gay living was his sole object in life, and he used to describe himself as 'just a lout'. He was not a hard drinker, however; and there is no reason to suspect him of having encouraged Mussorgsky to intemperance. He was, in fact, very fond of him, and he cherished his memory in after years, carefully preserving various objects associated with him.

By 1875, he was separated from his wife and living with his sister-in-law, Maria Izmailovna Fedorova. How Mussorgsky became the irregular couple's guest was told by Naumof to a niece of his: one night Mussorgsky, turned out of his home for non-payment of rent, went wandering penniless through the streets with a few possessions in a bag until he bethought himself of appealing to Naumof for hospitality. The story is confirmed by a passage of a letter from Liudmila Shestakova to Nikolsky, of 23 June: "I am so sorry for Mussorgsky: he is being turned out of his flat, and his position is very bad." Still, it was only in August that he went to live in Naumof's home; and according to a letter he wrote to Stassof, his reason for so doing was that Golenishchef-Kutuzof had gone away, taking the key of the flat with him. A likely explanation, Andreï Rimsky-Korsakof suggests, is that Mussorgsky lived a while alone in the rooms he had shared with Golenishchef-Kutuzof, was turned out in June, found a temporary shelter in the poet's new flat, and appealed to Naumof after the misadventure with the key. Anyhow, Mussorgsky certainly was in difficulties, and fortunate to find in Naumof a friend in need. He stayed with the family four years, being made welcome not only in their town flat but at their country house at Tsarskoë-Selo, near Petersburg, where he felt very happy as shown by a letter he wrote to Shestakova in August 1876:

> Yesterday evening Naumof and I took a long walk through lovely country. We were so thrilled that neither of us slept much afterwards. Silence around, broken only by the distant noise of a railwayman's horn or of a barking watchdog, or by rustles running through the leaves, like a *glissando* on a harp. Then, an invisible moon casting its gentle rays through the foliage straight upon my pillow. After the din and rush of town life, one cannot rest forthwith in the country: one feels fidgety, wondering why there is no noise, and what has happened to all the fuss and flurry. Could I but obtain leave of absence, how well I should work here!

Maybe none of Mussorgsky's other friends would have been willing to find a place for him in their homes, but the kindly, cheerful, easy-going Naumof was probably not a man to worry over a few lapses; and Mussorgsky, by nature unfit for solitude, was more than ever in need of human companionship. In his fondness and gratitude he strove hard to persuade his old friends not to give his hosts the cold shoulder—writing to Stassof, for instance (on 25 December 1876):

> My good friends wish to visit the Public Library, and especially the section of which you are in charge. I take pride in writing down their names: Maria Izmailovna Fedorova (under whose hospitable roof Mussorianin is living), Paul Alexandrovitch Naumof, and his young son Serghei—in a word, the family which has been taking care of me, the sinner. For the reason that you, dear friend, in your glowing kindness and far-reaching wisdom, have never turned your back upon anybody, I pray you, if at all possible, to arrange an appointment for Monday, 27th. I want us to find you there: otherwise the library will be cold and altogether different. Drop me a line if it is all right.

It is not recorded whether Stassof complied with this pathetically humble plea. But, naturally enough, no effort on Mussorgsky's part could have enabled Naumof and Maria Fedorova to be received in the society of his older friends—apart from the fact that the two lived, or seemed to be living as man and wife, Maria Fedorova (about whom nothing more definite is known) had a bad reputation and was freely criticized. So much so that, as early as December 1875, Mussorgsky chivalrously took up the cudgels in her defence, composing a song which he entitled 'The Misunderstood One'.* The words depict her, silent, proud, calm and contemptuous, gazing upon the horde of puny backbiters; it ends: "Be silent too, you shameless ones, and hear at last the blows of the hammer that strikes at your guilty consciences." The music—like the words, rather declamatory—is of no great interest. Mussorgsky inscribed the song to his hostess, giving her not her married, but her original name, Maria Izmailovna Kostiurina, and adding the words "the lady by the Christmas tree". He took no steps to have it published or publicly performed. It appeared in 1911 only.

So it was after settling in his new home that Mussorgsky finished, in September 1875, the first act of *Khovanshchina*. On 30 December he triumphantly announced to Stassof that the second act was finished: two days later, that he was starting on the third; and on 3 January 1875, that a good part of the third act was ready to be shown, and that he intended to reach the middle of it that very day. He must have been very fit to be able to work at such speed.

In March and April, he was busily engaged in helping Liudmila Shestakova to organize the celebration of Petrof's jubilee—the fiftieth anniversary of the great singer's first appearance on the stage (at the age of nineteen, at Elizabethgrad, in an operetta entitled *The Cossack Poet*). The celebration took place on 24 April, when a gala performance of Glinka's *A Life for the Tsar*, in which Petrof had created the part of Ivan Sussanin in 1836, was given at the Marinsky Theatre, and Mussorgsky heartily rejoiced in the triumph.

In May he held out the olive branch to Rimsky-Korsakof (with whom, obviously, he must have had a quarrel which is not mentioned in Rimsky-Korsakof's Memoirs or in any other source of information) writing to him a thoroughly characteristic letter:

> Friend Nikolai Andreïvitch, I shall call on you on Monday at 8 p.m. We must meet—a fig for that tiff of ours! It cheers me up to think that you are preparing to give Russia's songs to the Russians and to the world

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* The titles given, in the Bessel edition, to both the French translation (for which the author of this book is responsible) and the English, are misleading: the French title ought to be 'L'Incomprise'.

at large—a sacred undertaking that will make history. There is a danger of these songs getting lost: so when one thinks that a gifted Russian is about to rescue them one can but rejoice and feel at rest. I embrace you, friend.

The reference is to the book of Russian folk-songs which Rimsky-Korsakof was engaged in compiling, and in which he included songs communicated by Mussorgsky, including the Riabinin song used in *Boris* and the one whose tune was used for Marfa's love song in *Khovanshchina.*

The spurt of industry soon came to an end, probably owing to the difficulties he encountered with *Khovanshchina* (for which Stassof was offering suggestions that did not always simplify matters) and also to the fact that after Petrof's jubilee his thoughts had turned again to *The Sorotchintsi Fair.* His increasingly vacillating and visionary frame of mind is reflected in a letter to Stassof of 15 June:

You have been angry with Mussorianin—maybe unjustly, but Mussorianin affectionately defers. He has been working . . . it is only in order to be able to work that he requires peace. *Khovanshchina* is too big, too exceptional a task. You surely do not suspect me of having taken your remarks and suggestions in a non-Mussorianin spirit? . . . I have stopped work. I have been thinking things over for quite a while and shall continue to do so, concentrating upon the one thought of carrying the day and speaking to the people a new message of friendship and love, a sincere message that will traverse the whole breadth of the Russian land, the truth-proclaiming message of a humble musician, but one who is a fighter for the true conception of art. Your new suggestion is most promising. I must work out the idea. Thanks to you, we have understood Marfa at last, and we shall make that Russian woman immaculate.

P.S. I have been practising the piano a lot, and am beginning to believe that if need arose, I could earn my daily bread by pawing the ivories.

This postscript unavoidably suggests that he no longer felt altogether secure in his office job.

In July he resumed work on both *The Fair* and *Khovanshchina.* He composed (Stassof told Golenishchef-Kutuzof) a good deal of fine music that summer. Throughout the year he worked hopefully and sedulously enough, although feeling at times very weary. In October the Marinsky Theatre started giving *Boris Godunof* in an appallingly abridged form: the coronation, the inn, the scene in the Tsar's apartments, the Polish act, and the Duma and the Tsar's death. Stassof protested energetically in the Press; of Mussorgsky's feelings there is no record whatever (but see *supra*, p. 163). Maybe, as in 1873, he was so wrapt in his dreams of *Khovanshchina* that the fate of *Boris* at the moment did not affect him much: but Rimsky-Korsakof's assertion that the mauling of his masterpiece contributed to depress him should not be overlooked.

Very little information is available as to the happenings of 1877. In March he composed five songs to texts by Alexeï Tolstoi and another to a poem by Golenishchef-Kutuzof entitled 'Vision'. None of these is of great interest. The fourth and last of the *Songs and Dances of Death* was finished in June at Tsarskoë-Selo. There, too, he finished in July *Joshua* a very fine choral scene with soli and piano accompaniment, which was a remodelled and amplified version, planned and partly carried out in 1874, of a chorus of Libyan warriors in *Salammbô*. Dimitri Stassof vainly tried to help Mussorgsky find a publisher for *Joshua* and the *Songs and Dances of Death*. They appeared only after his death. In April, he noted down a couple of Eastern folk-tunes for the last opera *Pugatchevshchina*. He intended to start work on this after finishing *Khovanshchina*. The subject was to be taken from Pushkin's tale *The Captain's Daughter* with the addition, Stassof says, of many other elements.

His friends were out of touch with him from June to September. "I have heard nothing of him", Stassof wrote to Golenishchef-Kutuzof on 31 July, "except that he has composed and actually written out a fine Khivria scene"; and on 22 August: "I have absolutely no news of him".

The manuscript of the Khivria scene and air (for *The Sorotchintsi Fair*) bears the date 10 July 1877, and is inscribed to Alexandra Molas. It is the only thing he composed that year after having finished *Joshua*.

At the beginning of the autumn he reappeared in town. Stassof informed Golenishchef-Kutuzof that "he had turned out a lot of rubbish for *The Fair* during the summer, but had now decided to scrap it all, and had since composed two gipsy choruses" (letter of 7 November). Stassof and he spent every Tuesday evening at the house of the Molas family. Alexandra Molas in her recollections says that Mussorgsky generally came several times a week to dinner and stayed the whole evening:

"After dinner he would have a nap in an easy chair, and afterwards sit at the piano and extemporize. My children loved him: as soon as they saw him, they would shout 'Mussorianin is here: hurrah!' He was ever saying that in our home he found relief and could forget a while his difficulties and burdens."

The horizon was dark indeed for him. Before the end of the winter the death of his beloved Petrof threw him into black despair. But by that time he had already deteriorated appreciably, judging by this sentence in a letter from Stassof to Golenishchef-Kutuzof: "On the day of Petrof's death, Mussorgsky came to Liudmila Shestakova's house, looking almost like a normal human being."

Of the way in which he bore the blow there is but a single record—a very touching one—from Kompaneisky's pen:

> Mussorgsky's face after death, with its tightened lips, bore the expression he used to wear when lost in thought. Gazing upon it, I remembered the day, three years earlier, when he and I were sitting by Petrof's grave, and he spoke in hushed tones of his unbearable grief and its unavoidable consequences. He was sobbing bitterly, spasmodically, as only children are wont to sob. " With his death everything is lost for me", he said. "I have lost the support of my bitter life. Of late years, I felt that his home was my home. He fed me with artistic truth and inspired me to create."

From that moment on his downfall was rapid. Many records of distressing episodes of that period and the following are available.[3] A letter which Shestakova wrote to Stassof on 9 August runs:

> Let us now talk of a man who stands very close to you—of Mussorgsky. I have long refrained from mentioning him to you, for fear of the distress I might cause you. Last week he appeared at my house in an appalling condition. He stayed quite a long while. Seeing that things were getting worse, I felt I had to do something. In order to spare him whilst protecting myself, I wrote him a letter, asking him not to call on me when suffering from what he calls his nervous disorder. Of course I put it as gently as I could. Yesterday, my dear Mussinka appeared, perfectly correct, and gave me his word never to distress me again. We shall see how things go. But for some time, at least, I think he will keep himself in hand. I am sorry for him indeed: he has so much in him that is good! If it were possible to detach him from Naumof, I think he might be rescued.

Anxious letters passed between Stassof and Balakiref. "Mussorgsky is going to the dogs", the former wrote; and the latter expressed his conviction that the situation was hopeless: "He is such a physical wreck that he can hardly cease to be the corpse he is at present". As early as April, Stassof had applied to Terty Filippof, who was the Director of the Government Control Department, asking him to secure for Mussorgsky a transfer to this department. Filippof, a friend of Balakiref, a folk-song enthusiast, and a great admirer of Mussorgsky's genius, proved willing. No doubt Balakiref, who after the renewal of friendly relations which had just taken place (see *infra*), was thoroughly well disposed towards his quondam pupil, pleaded with Filippof, too. The transfer took place on 1 October.

According to the recollections of Nikolai Lavrof (1854?–1927; a pianist and professor at the Leningrad Conservatoire, who in 1879–80 used to meet Mussorgsky at the Petersburg Musical and Dramatic Amateur Circle), Filippof was "indulgent to the point of unfairness, forgiving him for doing no work and often arriving at the office in a state of intoxication. Admitting that his leniency was excessive, he explained it by saying: 'I am the servant of the artists'. All Mussorgsky did at the office was to collect his salary on the 20th of each month."

In November he fell seriously ill. An illiterate scrawl from some unknown hand reached Balakiref informing him that "Modest Petrovitch Mussorgsky had had a stroke and was at present at Daria Mikhailovna Leonova's flat, Kokushkin Bridge, 70". By 24 November he was well enough to write a short note to Shestakova; on 10 December he attended at the Marinsky Theatre the twentieth performance of *Boris Godunof* and had to take several calls.

Except for a small amount of work on *Khovanshchina* in July and August, and the setting of a poem by Pleshcheef, 'The Wanderer', the year was a blank so far as composition was concerned.

The ups and downs during this last period of his life are difficult to follow step by step. Periods of comparatively good health and cheerfulness alternated with periods of depression and incapacity in quick and, at times, surprisingly sudden succession. For instance, the pleasant meeting with Balakiref already referred to took place a very few days before Mussorgsky's visits to Shestakova "in an appalling condition". And Balakiref was very favourably impressed; he wrote to Stassof (28 July): " I was pleasantly surprised to find no trace in him of his former self-complacency and vainglory. He was, on the contrary, quite humble, listening carefully and not uttering a word of protest when told it was imperative to know harmony, nor objecting to the idea of working at it with Rimsky-Korsakof."

Whether this meekness should be ascribed to lowered vitality or to the joy of resuming friendly relations with Balakiref is an open question. But Mussorgsky's own account to Stassof of the meeting was: "I am enraptured. Many fine things were mentioned, many fine things examined, and above all the grand memory of our past artistic doings was evoked—so far, this is all I can truthfully tell you." It seems to show that he found the meeting stimulating. The last sentence is cryptic, but may refer to the fact that Balakiref had persuaded Mussorgsky to remodel his *Night on the Bare Mountain.* A day or two after that meeting, Mussorgsky wrote to Shestakova that he had been laid up with new fever, but was recovering speedily enough to call upon her on the 28th to talk of many things connected with the memory of Petrof.

The opportunity to take up harmony with Rimsky-Korsakof never came, and maybe Mussorgsky did not give a second thought to the idea. A remodelling of the *Night on the Bare Mountain* took place in 1880, but not on the lines suggested by Balakiref (see chapter V *supra*).

A period of activity must have followed close upon Mussorgsky's recovery (in December): for in January 1879 it was announced in the Press—very prematurely—that he would shortly submit his new opera *Khovanshchina* to the committee of the Imperial Theatres. And that year a variety of events contributed to fan the hopes that were ever glowing in his heart. On 16 January the scene in the cell, from *Boris Godunof*, which had never been included in the stage performance, was heard for the first time at a concert of the Free School of Music, Rimsky-Korsakof conducting. The last of Rimsky-Korsakof's uncharitably worded recollections of him refers to this event. "At the rehearsals he behaved extravagantly, as he often did when under the influence of wine, or wished to pose. He listened with a great show of attention, now bowing his head, now haughtily raising it and shaking his hair, now theatrically throwing up his arm—always a favourite gesture of his. When, at the end, the tam-tam was struck *pianissimo*, in imitation of the monastery bell, he made the player a deep respectful obeisance, arms crossed on his breast."

According to the one available notice of the concert,* the scene created a favourable impression, despite the "endless recitative" and the not very satisfactory reading given by the singers, V. I. and V. V. Vassilief.

In March, Marfa's song from *Khovanshchina* and 'Forgotten' were given for the first time, the former by Leonova at her concert, the latter by B. Korsof at a concert given by another singer, Krutikova. And in the late spring, Leonova came forth with the plan for a great concert tour through central and south Russia for Mussorgsky and herself.

Mussorgsky was delighted, but his friends disapproved of the scheme, Filippof alone regarding it as excellent. Vladimir Stassof wrote to Balakiref that "Mussorgsky expected great things from the tour, and about 1,000 roubles profit (!!!)—but failed to realize that he was preparing to shame himself and his friends." Balakiref thoroughly agreed: "It is horrible", he wrote to Shestakova. "If you could but dissuade him, you would rescue him from the shameful part he is about to assume. Moreover, both he and Leonova are taking a big risk. Should he suddenly have a haemorrhage as happened once at your house, what then? He'll probably die: for she will not fail to give him drink." Later he was to write: "Glory and honour to Leonova! She must be large-hearted indeed to be able so disinterestedly to take charge of a man such as Modest Petrovitch when there is no hope whatever of his pulling through" (to Stassof, 14 February 1881).

This was an unduly censorious attitude to take. Daria Mikhailovna Leonova, at that time fifty years of age, had had a successful career on the Imperial stage until 1873, and made in 1875 a brilliantly successful tour through Siberia, the Far East, and North America. She was past her prime as a singer, but still popular with the public. She had a fine, sonorous voice of great compass, which had won Glinka's and Dargomyjsky's approval, and, abroad, Meyerbeer's and Auber's. She used it, maybe, with more spirit than style, but effectively enough; her singing was often rather gipsy-like. She was a confirmed believer in Mussorgsky's music ever since she had sung, in 1868, his 'Hopak', which he had orchestrated specially for the occasion; and especially after having appeared as the innkeeper at the first performance of excerpts from *Boris Godunof* in 1873. And she was a kind-hearted woman, genuinely eager to do him a good turn, while serving her own interests by having him by her side. Later, she was to stand by him in his hour of distress.

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* *Sunday Music and Information Journal*, quoted in *Mussorgsky: Letters and Documents.*

The Balakiref-Stassof group did not think much of her, regarding her as a poor musician and intolerable boaster. Maybe one of the drawbacks they foresaw on this particular occasion was that the manager of the tour was to be her husband (or reputed husband) Feodor Gridnin, a journalist and editor of doubtful reputation.

Anyhow, these well-meaning, maybe a trifle touchy friends, so ready to talk of disgrace, seem not to have sufficiently weighed the circumstances of the case, which Andreï Rimsky-Korsakof[27] judiciously sets forth as follows:

> The tour was desirable, first and foremost, owing to Mussorgsky's difficulties. His new appointment was doomed to terminate soon, for his health, physical and mental, was too seriously undermined for him to be able to carry on with his duties. The change, too, was bound to have a beneficial effect on him. In fact, his reactions to the impressions of natural scenery, to the new surroundings, to the events of the journey were very strong—which is hardly astonishing when one thinks of the lamentable conditions of his life in Petersburg, of the burden of his office work, and the other circumstances that drove him more and more towards drink. The tone of the letters he wrote from the places he visited, especially during the early part of the journey, reveals an almost morbidly heightened excitability.

The letters also show him ingenuously and whole-heartedly enjoying the experiences the journey provided; and there is no indication that during the three months or so taken up by the tour, he ever yielded to his failing. Instead, he must have had a remarkable capacity for recuperation, so often did he succeed in mastering for a while his craving for alcohol and shaking off its effects. But there can be no doubt as to the seriousness of the evil. Godet said in *En marge de Boris Godunof* that "the question arises whether Mussorgsky's friends did not tamper with his biography as they (*sic*) tampered with his music". This, let it be repeated, amounts to suggesting that practically everybody around him conspired to provide false evidence even in private communications never intended for publication. And, besides the documents already quoted here, and others that will be quoted further, there are testimonies[3] from Dr. Vassili Bertenson, the composer Ippolitof-Ivanof, the philosopher and writer on music Lapshin, the author Stakheef, Lavrof, and others that positively show Godet's suspicions to be untenable, and most unfair.

The material advantages of the tour did not come up to Mussorgsky's expectations; but from the artistic point of view, results were most encouraging for him. Besides acting as Leonova's accompanist, he appeared as a soloist, playing no music originally composed for piano except his own 'Intermezzo' and a few minor pieces (nothing from the *Pictures from an Exhibition*) but a good many arrangements of other compositions of his—including the choral *Joshua*—or of Glinka's. The numbers were provided with impressively explanatory titles; for instance: 'The triumphal procession of Tsar Boris to the chimes of big bells and acclamation of the people, a musical picture from the opera *Boris Godunof*'; 'Evening ramble of the guests in the gardens of the Sandomir Voyevod Mnishek, a Polish musical picture from the opera *Boris Godunof*'; 'The glorification of Tchernobog and the witches' sabbath on the Bare Mountain (the vision of the weary goatherd), a musical picture from the new comic opera *Sorotchintsi Fair*'; 'Prince Golitsyn leaving Moscow on his way to exile in Bieloozero, a musical picture from the new opera *Khovanshchina*,' and so on.

The programmes included songs and vocal excerpts from operas by Mussorgsky, Glinka, Dargomyjsky, Serof, Balakiref, Rubinstein, Pashchenko, Cui, Rimsky-Korsakof, Borodin, Schubert, Schumann, Meyerbeer, Liszt, Gounod; Russian folk-songs; and drawing-room songs, one or two of which were by Leonova herself. All told, the repertory justified Mussorgsky's feeling that he was helping to propagate the best of Russian music among "the good people of Russia".

A few passages from the letters—long, but not many in number—in which the events of the tour are recorded should suffice to give an idea of his "heightened excitability" and also his happiness.

To the Naumofs, Poltava, 30 July:

> The takings were good, though below expectations. The artistic triumph is irrevocable. We were fortunate in being received in the splendid homes of the Miloradovitch, Mossolof and Schröder families. Daria Mikhailovna was, is, and ever will be peerless. What a wonderful creature! Energy, power, depth of feeling, everything in her attracts and binds one to her. The audiences were moved to tears and deeply thrilled. We were smothered with flowers—splendid flowers. At the Miloradovitch estate near Poltava we were enchanted with the beauty of everything, and especially with our charming hostess, a most cultured, warm-hearted woman, European to her finger-tips, self-possessed, elegant and wise.

The air is so sweet here that it brings peace of heart and oblivion of all evil. The chief loveliness of Poltava lies in the pyramid-shaped poplar trees that like giant sentries keep watch over houses, hills and valleys. In the soft moonlight, which is reflected on the white cottages and shimmers in the air all *vert de lumière*, they loom almost black. The whole picture is entrancing.

To the same, Nikolaïef, 3 August:

To-day we called on the governor. We were received charmingly. He is a man of great wisdom and sensitiveness, and a keen art-lover. We also called upon the admirals—one and all fine fellows, likeable, thoroughly sympathetic. There have been additions to our repertory: Liszt's 'King of Thule', Borodin's 'The Sea', a romance-mazurka by Chopin. And there will be many more: Leonova treasures in her artist heart all these desirable guests.

To the same, Kherson, 15 August:

To-day we give our first concert here. It will pave the way for further musical excursions. On the road I shall get hold of new, important musical ideas, and Daria Mikhailovna will present the resulting compositions. Our artistic success so far has been invariable. Surely our undertaking will prove, and indeed is already proving, a great service in the realm of art to the good Russian people. And how wonderful the journey to Kherson on the Dnieper! Joy of joys! Through the long avenues of rushes, famous in history (some of them twelve to eighteen feet high) out of which, of old, the sturdy Zaporogs in their dug-outs used to rush upon the boats of the invading Turks, the calm waters shone so blue, reflecting the tall trees whose image extended right to the middle of the stream, in the rosy and lavender light of setting sun, moon and Jupiter.

Talking of Jupiter, the Director of the Nikolaïef Observatory kindly allowed us to observe, through the big telescope, Jupiter and Saturn. I nearly went mad with joy.

To Vladimir Stassof, Yalta, 10 September:

In Petersburg too little is known of conditions in the provinces. So, for your information: the Russian towns that painters and musicians are in the habit of visiting have little use for music or for any art (Odessa, Nikolaïef, Sebastopol); on the contrary those towns which they never or hardly ever visit are very musical and love art (Elizavetgrad, Kherson, Poltava).

At Poltava *Khovanshchina* created a great impression. The final scene, admirably sung by Leonova, overwhelmed the audience. *The Sorotchintsi Fair* was received with favour everywhere in the Ukraine, everybody assuring me that the music was thoroughly national in character. I myself was able to ascertain as much, being on the spot.

At Nikolaïef, in the home of the charming Yurkovskys, Leonova and I introduced my *Nursery* to the children. They were delighted, and the nurses too. The same thing happened at Kherson in the home of the Boshniak family. O Laroche! O Solovief! O Laroche and Solovief and Ivanof, with Galter thrown in! [the Petersburg critics who disapproved of Mussorgsky's music].

On the boat that carried us to Sebastopol I wrote down a Greek and a Jewish song. I joined in the singing of the latter. All the singers were delighted, and dubbed me a master. At Odessa, I attended two synagogue services, and found them beautiful.

A letter to Shestakova, of 9 September, shows Mussorgsky under all those influences, lost again in dreams of wonderful achievements.

How much that is new, enchanting, rejuvenating does not nature give us! How revealing (at times essentially so) it is to meet new people, whose feeling for art is far greater than that of certain unappreciated trumpeters in our all-Russian Press. My present experiences are a great lesson to me. Years have fallen from my shoulders, life is calling me to new musical tasks, to grand musical doings. Farther, farther ahead along the auspicious road! What I have done so far is not comprehended. So, onward, eagerly towards the new shores of an unexplored art. To seek those shores, tirelessly, fearlessly, serenely, and then to stand firm on the soil of the promised land, there is a grand, a fascinating duty!

At that time, one of Vladimir Stassof's daughters, Sophia Fortunato, was running the Hotel Russia in Yalta. Her recollections of Mussorgsky's visit to that city are the one and only independent account we have of any part of the tour:

I was unable to procure Mussorgsky's address, and so did not get into touch with him before the first concert. Arriving at the Club Hall where the concert was taking place, to my distress I saw a very small audience, although Yalta was crowded with visitors at the time. At the first interval, I went round to the artists' room. Mussorgsky was sitting in an easy chair, arms hanging limply, like a wounded bird. The failure of the concert, the sight of the nearly empty hall had affected him deeply. I learnt that he and Leonova had arrived late the previous evening, and, unable to find proper accommodation, had spent the night in an uncomfortable, dirty house. I arranged for them to come, the next day, to my hotel, where there was a big sitting-room with a grand piano. There were many visitors there, whom we persuaded to attend the second concert. He and Leonova stayed with us a week or so. They often delighted us with their music. Needless to say how deeply impressed all the listeners were—young and old, and even those who had never, or hardly ever, heard any music. We made several expeditions into the country. He was deeply moved by the beauty of the landscape, the sea, the mountains, the lovely moonlight nights, and the sweetness of the air. He usually climbed into the back seat of the carriage, so as not to be distracted from his enjoyment by conversation.

It is natural to surmise that elsewhere, too, a good deal must have happened that was disappointing or trying in some way or other. But not a word to that effect appears in Mussorgsky's letters: owing either to his inborn disposition or to a sense of loyalty to the undertaking, he seems to have seen the bright side only. Mentally, he was living in a world of illusion; nothing could be further from the 'promised land' towards which he felt himself drawn than the small amount of music he turned out during the tour—'Baïdary' and 'Gurzuf' for piano, two indifferent little pieces suggested by impressions of the Crimea, and 'The Song of the Flea' from Goethe's *Faust*, an effective but not in the least imaginative setting. A third, more important piano piece, 'Storm on the Black Sea' was composed and often played by him during the tour and after, but never written down. It was found disappointing by all who heard it, despite his brilliant interpretation of it.[3, 15]

The last concerts took place at Voronej (4 and 7 October) and Tambof (14 October); and after some three months' absence, Mussorgsky returned to Petersburg where, a little later (27 November) excerpts from *Khovanshchina* were given at a Free School of Music concert, Rimsky-Korsakof conducting. These were the chorus of the Streltsy from the third act, Marfa's song, and the Persian dances—the first two in Mussorgsky's scoring, the third in Rimsky-Korsakof's. "He had promised to deliver the full score, but delayed so long that I offered to do the scoring for him. He agreed forthwith, and was delighted with my work, although I had rectified here and there his harmonies and part-writing".[15]

Meanwhile, his prospects were growing gloomier. The time was nearing when his work with the Commission of Government Control would come to an end (31 December, 1879) and he would be left without resources. But a kind of mystic faith sustained him, as shown by a letter he wrote, on 19 December to Shestakova:

My very dear Liudmila Ivanovna,

By your kind words and your frank utterances to me who am grappling with the problem of earning my daily bread, you have hallowed me as both man and artist. Indeed, had I been so reckless as to break faith, to give in, to play ducks and drakes with art and with myself, I should have found no single word of excuse within my conscience. But you found the right words, and thus hallowed me. In the same way as you saved Glinka's works in all their purity and radiance for the world to enjoy [a reference to her editorial and propaganda work] so did you find, in the greatness of your heart, the kind words and frank advice I needed.

Meanwhile, his friends were striving their utmost to find ways of helping him. A group of them, including Filippof, Jemtchujnikof, the poet, a certain Neronof, and others whose names are not recorded, clubbed together to make him a monthly allowance of 100 roubles in order to enable him to finish *Khovanshchina* in peace. It was probably in reply to a letter informing him of this arrangement that he wrote to Vladimir Stassof, on 16 January 1880:

Many thanks, dear *Généralissime*, for the good news. Despite a few misfortunes, I am not losing and shall never lose heart. My motto, which you know: "Onwards, boldly, towards new shores!" remains unchanged. If fate enables me to widen the beaten track that leads to the vital goal of art, I shall rejoice and triumph. The demands that art makes upon the artist of to-day are so tremendous that they may well engulf him whole. Past is the time when one could work at leisure: now one must give oneself up wholly to the people.

So he took up *Khovanshchina* afresh; and in order to simplify the task of finishing it "curtailed it drastically, suppressing whole episodes and loosely stringing the remainder together".[15] But he soon lost interest in the work. On 17 February, Stassof wrote to Balakiref: "Apparently another group has been formed to make Mussorgsky an allowance of eighty roubles a month on the understanding that he will finish *The Sorotchintsi Fair* within a year or so. This is why he is so unwilling to carry on with *Khovanshchina*."

A little later he again changed his mind and, from that moment on, was enmeshed in the impossible task of finishing both operas jointly.

Leonova, at an orchestral concert she gave on 8 April, sang an excerpt from the final scene of *Khovanshchina*. Another excerpt was included in the programme of one or two concerts she gave at Tver, a few days later, Mussorgsky co-operating. She invited him to spend the summer at her country house at Oranienbaum. There he finished the third act of *Khovanshchina* (manuscript dated 29 May) and composed portions of the fourth and fifth acts (August).

Three brief letters to Stassof—the last ones he wrote, except for a business note to Rimsky-Korsakof, in December—give the following particulars:

5 August

One more little bit of the collective suicide by fire, and *Khovanshchina* will be finished. I shall tell you about *The Sorotchintsi Fair* shortly. I've done a good deal of it. Tchernobog is quite ready. I have planned a suite for orchestra with harps and piano, on motives obtained from various good pilgrims of this world. The programme will be: from the Bulgarian shores through the Black Sea, the Caucasus, the Caspian and Fergan to Birma. A little of it is already composed.
Writing tires my hand terribly.

22 August

Our *Khovanshchina* is finished, except for one small bit of the final suicide scene. This we shall have to talk over together, as it is all a matter of stage technique. I have shown Filippof (having recovered my voice) the act with Ivan Khovansky's death. He was pleased with it. But please tell me what I am to do with my devils in *The Fair*. What are they to be like? What kind of a vision can a drunken goatherd have in his dream? I implore your help. The Tchernobog scene will be grand, but . . . but the stage spectacle will have to be on new, live lines. I hate the idea of having anything trite or second-rate. So, help me!

27/28 August

Concerning Mussorianin the sinner, all I can say is that this very second, at night, he has finished the clear draft of the market scene in *The Fair*. *Khovanshchina* is practically finished. But the scoring . . . O ye gods! . . . time! . . .
Yet, maybe, Mussorianin will remain true to his unvarying motto: when a new, unexplored path opens, is he to pull up? Never! Onwards!

These letters show that he was living, to a great extent, in a land of illusion. He had every reason to be pleased with the Tchernobog scene, a very effective choral version of his *Night on the Bare Mountain*—or rather of the rearrangement he had made of it in 1872 for inclusion in *Mlada.* But the fifth act of *Khovanshchina* was still in a sketchy, shapeless form. Of the orchestral suite he mentioned not a trace has been discovered.

He was in a very poor condition. According to recollections communicated to Lapshin by S. Rojdestvensky, a professor at the Petersburg University, who that same summer was a guest at Leonova's house, "his appearance was exactly that which Repin's famous portrait of him shows [see *infra*, p. 207]. He was shabbily dressed, and more than once second-hand clothes had to be purchased for him. He often suffered from hallucinations. He was still capable of playing, and occasionally of singing, brilliantly".[16]

In the course of the summer Leonova discussed with him the idea of jointly organizing a school of singing. The notion attracted him, she says in her recollections. It seemed to him that he would be enabled to earn some money, of which he stood in great need. But "at first, we had but a small number of pupils. This distressed him, but we decided to work hard in order to attract others. We devised new methods of tuition. For instance, when we had to give lessons to two, three or four pupils, he would compose solfeggios in duet, trio or quartet form. This proved very useful. And soon our school was well spoken of. But, alas, before the end of our first year's work, death claimed him."

Rimsky-Korsakof in his Memoirs devotes a paragraph or two to the undertaking, saying that Mussorgsky's participation was a valuable advertisement for Leonova: "She stood in need of an accompanist and musician capable of helping her pupils to learn their songs correctly and of teaching elementary theory. He devoted a good deal of his time to the school, and would turn out trios and quartets with atrocious part-writing. His duties were unenviable, but he remained—or tried to remain—unconscious of the fact."

These remarks might convey the impression that the arrangement was one-sided. But, in point of fact, it seems that he needed Leonova as much as she needed him, if only for the reason that no other of his friends seems to have been in close touch with him during these last months of his struggles and downfall. That he should have stood in need of the small sums he earned by his work at the school suggests that he must have been spending a good deal on drink; for, under normal conditions, he could have managed reasonably well on his monthly allowances. Every one around him must have felt thoroughly discouraged; and in all likelihood, a sense of shame may have led him to keep away from his friends most of the time. But his duties kept him in daily touch with Leonova, and she stood by him to the last, showing great kindness and understanding.

The autumn and early winter months were uneventful. On 11 October, the rearrangement he had made of a March in *Mlada* to commemorate the taking of Kars was performed at a Russian Music Society concert. On 3 February 1881 Rimsky-Korsakof conducted a performance of *The Destruction of Sennacherib* at a Free School of Music concert. Mussorgsky attended, and was cheered. A day or two later, a memorial meeting in honour of Dostoevsky (who had died on 28 January) took place at a literary club. When the great writer's portrait was exhibited, draped in crape, Mussorgsky sat at the piano and extemporized funeral music "not dissimilar to that of the death scene in *Boris Godunof*".[16]

There is no indication of his having composed, or even thought of composing, anything else during all that period.

The final collapse came suddenly on 10 February. Leonova describes it thus:

> One day he came to me in a frightful state of nerves, and told me that he was at the end of his tether, and that nothing remained for him but to go and beg in the streets. I did my utmost to soothe him, telling him that I was willing to share with him what little I had. This calmed him a little. That same evening we had to attend a party at General Sokalsky's house; his daughter, a pupil of ours, was to sing for the first time before a big audience. After the music was over, the guests started dancing and I joined in a card game. All of a sudden, Sokalsky's son came to me and asked whether Mussorgsky was subject to fits. He had had a stroke. A doctor who happened to be present looked after him; and when the moment came for us to leave, he seemed quite normal again. I took him to my flat, and he implored me to allow him to spend the night there, as he was feeling very shaky. I gave him a small room and told my servant to keep watch over him all night, and to call me at once if need arose. All night he slept in an arm-chair. In the morning he came to breakfast looking quite happy. He thanked me and said he was feeling quite well. But, as he spoke, he made a half-turn to the right and suddenly fell to the floor. Two other similar fits occurred in the course of the day. In the evening I called all his friends, beginning with

Vladimir Stassof and Filippof. It was decided that he would be better cared for in hospital. For a long while he objected, but at last he was persuaded to agree.

Dr. Lev Bertenson, to whom his friends applied for help, arranged for him to be admitted to the Nikolaevsky Military Hospital, of which he was a resident physician. The hospital being for officers and soldiers only, he had to be registered as "voluntary orderly to the resident physician Bertenson". Thanks to the assistance of the physician-in-chief he was given, Dr. Bertenson says,[4] comfortable and cheery quarters. Two Sisters of Mercy, an assistant surgeon and the regular staff looked after him. On 16 February Vladimir Stassof wrote to Balakiref: "Now the doctors say that he was laid down not by a stroke, but by the beginning of epilepsy. I saw him yesterday and to-day. He looks all right and recognizes everybody, but he talks a lot of nonsense. They say he shows symptoms of insanity. According to the doctors he is done for. He may live another year or die at any moment."

By the beginning of March, his condition had improved a little. Many of his friends used to visit him daily. Repin began, on 2 March, to paint his famous portrait of him*—a terrible testimony of the ravages of alcohol and illness. He finished it on 5 March. Kompaneisky relates that a few days before his death Mussorgsky was hopeful and buoyant: "His eyes were shining bright, and he said to me: 'All is well now. I am cured, and shall soon be able to resume work'."

Likewise Golenishchef-Kutuzof: "Three days before the end came, Mussorgsky was looking forward to a complete recovery. He spoke of his longing to start on a new big work. 'And, you know', he said to me, 'it will have to be something entirely new, never touched before: and not historical or in any way prosaic. So far we have only done small things together. Let us do better: you write a fantastic drama and I shall set it to music without changing a single word of the text—exactly as Dargomyjsky did with Pushkin's *Stone Guest*. But look here; not a word of this to anybody, let it remain a secret.' "

The obituary by Ivanof in the *Novoe Vremya* describes his end thus:

> His last two days were a protracted agony. Paralysis of the arms and legs set in. He breathed with difficulty. His mind remained clear to the

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* See frontispiece.

end. On the Saturday, his condition was hopeless but he refused to believe that the end was near. He insisted on being given the newspapers to read, and his friends took great pains to hide from him the paragraphs referring to his illness. They succeeded in making him sign a power of attorney for Filippof to deal with his works and possessions, without his realizing the dread significance of the act. The next morning, feeling a little better, he rejoiced and started dreaming of journeys to the Crimea and Constantinople (his friends had already subscribed money for the purpose), and merrily recounting anecdotes of his life. He insisted on being put in an arm-chair "so as to look nice, because his daily visitors included ladies". His condition remained stationary throughout the day and night, but he died at five o'clock in the morning on the Monday, 16 March. Two assistant surgeons who were present reported that he suddenly gave two loud cries and expired a quarter of an hour later.

Alexandra Molas in her recollections[3] says that a female nurse was present too, and heard him cry out: "All is over! Woe is me!"

The immediate cause of his death was given as erysipelous inflammation of the legs. Ivanof says that when he entered the hospital, he was reported as suffering from a disease of the liver (probably cirrhosis), fatty degeneration of the heart and inflammation of the spinal marrow. It seems obvious that he had practically no chance of recovery, but possibly the end was hastened owing to his having been able to procure, with the complicity of one of the hospital servants, a bottle of brandy.[3,13]

Thus ended the tragedy. Looking backwards, one can but wonder whether anything could have averted it after the outbreak of 1873. The following lines, which refer to Rimsky-Korsakof's depiction of him in the Memoirs, arouse painful misgivings:

> I knew Mussorgsky only during the last three or four years of his life, and but slightly. I had the impression that his friends, and even his boon companions, had turned their backs upon him. He was always lonely, and felt his loneliness keenly. Any kind or encouraging word moved him deeply, but few of these came his way. Nobody took him seriously, and in the midst of the great city he felt himself quite alone. After all, even if his friends did not approve of his music, there was no reason on earth for them not to behave with him as they did with other people. He did not mind their views on his music much: but an atmosphere of coldness was created around him, partly owing to Stassof's intolerance and tactlessness. Stassof was so fierce in his onslaughts on those who did not agree wholesale with his vehement

praise of Mussorgsky that he irritated many people, and Mussorgsky paid the penalty. The atmosphere of indifference around him sapped his vitality. Even as told in the Memoirs, the story of his downfall is profoundly moving. The truth is so very different from what had been said and repeated. What relation is there between the portrayals bandied about of an arrogant, opinionated Mussorgsky and the unfortunate artist as he really was—an outcast child, grateful for the slightest signs of kindness or attention?*

Of the many other tributes paid to his sweetness and gentleness, another two may be quoted:

> Only one thing comforts me a little: that never during the long years of our friendship did I utter a single word or give the slightest sign of disapproval. He will live in my memory not only as the composer of *Boris* but as a rare, kind, honest and affectionate man.†

> He was everybody's friend and his own enemy. His kindness was boundless. The coolness and gentleness with which he bore the burden of his distress and difficulties were remarkable: he would laugh good-humouredly and carry on. He liked to poke fun at other people, but never uttered a word in malice.‡

Looking back upon his life, one realizes with astonishment and relief (for one feels him to have been as lovable as he was unfortunate) that he does not seem to have been as unhappy—except maybe now and then for short spells—as might have been expected. The childlike elements in his heart and soul, which endured to the very end, helped him greatly in his losing fight. His delight in the simplest pleasures and especially in the beauties of nature, his love for children and the bonds of sympathy that never failed to arise between him and them, are traits of character noteworthy not only in themselves, but because of the influence they had on him in his hours of adversity. Thanks to an infinite capacity for cheerfulness and hope, and to a strong faith in every one of his ventures or visions, he never allowed disappointments or failure to crush him, and he was able to find a large measure of happiness where anyone endowed with a less sunny disposition would have yielded to gloom.

There was, no doubt, too much softness in his make-up. A stronger nature might have resisted the nefarious influence of the Cadets' School and regiment. Maybe there was in him a predisposition to dipsomania coupled with an abnormal susceptibility to liquor: let his declaration that he did not enjoy drinking (*supra*, p. 129) and his habit of refusing wine when dining with friends (ib. 192) be remembered. If so, there would be a striking resemblance between his case and that of Edgar Allan Poe. Whether his fate would have been different had he not been launched on a military career can only be conjectured.

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* M. Ivanof, *Novoe Vremya*, 20 April 1909.

† Shestakova in a letter to Stassof, 20 March 1881.

‡ Kompaneisky, loc. cit.

He was given an impressive funeral, which took place on 18 March. Wreaths were sent by the Imperial Theatres, the Conservatoire, and other official organizations. He was laid to rest in the Alexander Nevsky cemetery, close by Glinka's grave, and not far from Dostoevsky. On 27 November 1885 a monument, designed by the architect Bogomolof, and bearing a medallion bust by Ginzburg, a pupil of Antokolsky, the titles of his principal works and two lines from Pimen's narrative in *Boris Godunof*:

> And thus the future generations
> Will of their faith and people learn the past

was unveiled. Balakiref, Borodin, Cui and Rimsky-Korsakof held the corners of the veil that covered it.

CHAPTER XIV

KHOVANSHCHINA AND *THE SOROTCHINTSI FAIR*

Khovanshchina *nearly finished in vocal score form—Lack of dramatic action—Main differences between the music and that of* Boris Godunof—*The existing portions of* The Sorotchintsi Fair

KHOVANSHCHINA, it will be remembered, was begun in 1873, Mussorgsky's intention was to picture the political events that marked the troubled years of the minority of Peter the Great, the principal characters being Prince Ivan Khovansky, the upholder of the old feudal regime and a plotter against the throne; Prince Golitsyn, who believed that Russia would find salvation by adopting Western civilization; and Dosifei, a monk, the leader of the Old Believers, whose concern was not with temporal affairs, but with spiritual salvation, and who regarded modern innovations as the work of Satan. The subject was to be the clash between the old regime and the new, the Princes Khovansky plotting against the throne, the annihilation of the sect of the Old Believers, and the final triumph of the Empress Regent and Tsar Peter the Great.

In proportion as he studied all available historical documents, he allowed himself to be swamped by the wealth of facts and particulars which he was ever discovering. In his eagerness to use them all, and also to work out to the full other scenes of his own devising, he lost all sense of proportion, and was led to overlook even the most elementary structural requirements.

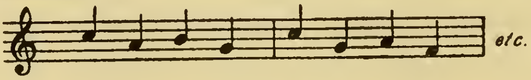
Eventually, in a desperate attempt to reduce his sketches and plans to order, he found himself compelled to shorten or leave out part of what he had already written, and to give up the idea of tackling certain other scenes. Instead of thereby making good the obscurities and gaps in the action, he increased them; and there is in *Khovanshchina* much that appears unconnected with the drama as a whole, besides not being interesting *per se*. Moreover, he was unable to finish the work: very little of what he had planned for Act v was written, and of that little, not all has been preserved; and only a few portions of the music were scored.

How does the music compare with that of *Boris*? To answer the question briefly is difficult. It may be said, roughly, that it is carried out on broader and somewhat smoother lines, with few bold innovations and a lesser wealth of interesting, pregnant technical details. Here and there it is thinner in texture; and, as a rule, it proceeds at a slower pace, in keeping with the action, which has none of the continuous onward impetus of *Boris*. Certain portions of it are weak, but many others are as telling and original, and as beautiful from the purely musical point of view (that is, apart from their value for dramatic purposes of characterization) as anything in *Boris*.

Its dramatic significance is different because its function is not the same. In *Boris* there is always action. The principal characters are doing something or other or tending somewhere or other. They are in motion, and in this motion the music co-operates. In *Khovanshchina* the only two things which occur on the stage and bear consequences shown on the stage are Shaklovity's denunciation and Andreï's pursuit of Emma. The other scenes are illustrative rather than active: chapters from or illustrations to a chronicle rather than constituent parts of a drama. In other words they are, essentially, characterization.

Much of the music of *Khovanshchina* is first rate and thoroughly representative of Mussorgsky: notably Dosifei's discourses in Act i, the crowd scenes and soldiers' scenes, the exciting march (chorus and orchestra; vocal score, pp. 62 ff.) and Ivan Khovansky's entry in Act ii. Marfa's incantation and prediction (pp. 136 ff.) and in Act iii her love-song; Shaklovity's aria (the style of which is very close to Glinka's), the entry of the Streltsy, again a rousing march with a chorus, and the final panic scene. Act iv is magnificent throughout, and exemplary in its terseness. What little is preserved of Act v is of austere grandeur. But certain signs, here and there, betoken either lack of attention, or exhaustion of ingenuity. For instance, Mussorgsky often uses patterns consisting of two falling intervals, either of which may be a third or fourth or a fifth thus:

Ex. 42a



These occur, throughout his output, in his instrumental and in his vocal music; but in the trio in Act ii so many phrases, whether sung by Golitsyn, Khovansky, or Dosifei, end in some form of it, that monotony ensues.

A few style-idiosyncrasies will be mentioned in a later chapter. Generally speaking, the music except when it is archaic in character—as in the chants of the Old Believers—is less unconventional than that of *Boris*. The rhythms, the melodic designs, and the periods are more often symmetrical, and the harmonies plainer. The texture is less rich, indeed thin at times; the accompaniment often is less significant, playing but a subordinate part, and consisting here and there of mere unison or duplication.

It is impossible to say whether these deficiencies would have been made good in the scoring. Mussorgsky scored but two fragments, Marfa's love song and the beginning of the ensemble that follows upon Shaklovity's aria, with regard to which the question does not arise. It should be added that the occasional thinness of texture makes itself felt even in Rimsky-Korsakof's arrangement.

There is no need to press the point further. Music-lovers wishful to know Mussorgsky as he really was, and to enjoy his music to the full, will welcome the publication of the genuine text. Study and enjoyment must be independent of many considerations which, under other conditions, would legitimately arise. We must be willing to treasure the musical beauties of *Khovanshchina* for their own sake. Many are the scenes which, adequately and reverently scored, might grace the repertory of our concerts. But the significant musical drama of which Mussorgsky dreamed at the very time when he had finished composing his wonderful *Boris Godunof* was never to be.

The portions of *The Sorotchintsi Fair* completed by Mussorgsky are: the Prelude, bearing the sub-title 'A summer day in Little-Russia'—fairly long and in full score; the market scene (adapted from *Mlada*) and part of the sequel, including a comic scene belonging to Act i; the major part of Act ii; the fantastic vision scene adapted from *A Night on the Bare Mountain* (chorus and piano duet); a short instrumental 'Hopak', and a couple of separate songs. Apart from the market scene and fantastic scene, these are utterly simple in texture, and at times thin. But most of the music is attractive, especially from the melodic point of view—attractive enough for the temptation to have arisen to publish and perform them as they stood or with a minimum of necessary complements.

The first editors were Liadof (1904) and Karatyghin (1912). Since then, three composers in turn have undertaken to complete and orchestrate the work: César Cui, in 1915 (version produced at St. Petersburg in 1917 and published by Bessel in 1924); Nikolai Tcherepnin (version produced at Monte Carlo in 1923, published by Bessel in 1924); and Shebalin (version published by the Russian State Editions in 1933).

The Shebalin edition is the only one that contains the fantastic scene. The inclusion of this very robust, mordant, weighty scene in a light comedy is regarded as a mistake by Karatyghin. In itself, it is, without a doubt, one of the most impressive things in Mussorgsky's output. As regards the musical value of *The Fair* generally, opinions vary. Karatyghin sets it very high, describing it as "the one and only example he has left us of pure comedy, never suggesting inner qualms or reflecting the worries and turmoil of town life, and containing no ultra-radical experiments such as are to be found in *The Marriage*." But, in all likelihood, most students will endorse Gerald Abraham's opinion: "The music contains some lovely pages and some broadly humorous ones, but the falling off of his inspiration in this opera is unmistakable. Still, let us be fair. If it was the work of a lesser man, we should welcome its sheafs of pleasant tunes, its grotesque humour and its charming colour, without grumbling that it is not more than it is."

CHAPTER XV

Posthumous Fate of the Works

Rimsky-Korsakof as editor and reviser—The revisions versus the originals—A history of opinion in Russia and other countries—Gradual reaction in favour of the originals

THE story of the fate of Mussorgsky's works from the day of his death to the present time is the strangest in the whole history of music.

After his death, his friends' first concern was with his unpublished manuscripts. Filippof, in his capacity as executor and trustee, took charge of all business arrangements. An agreement was signed giving Bessel all rights on the whole of the unpublished output, and Rimsky-Korsakof undertook to prepare the manuscripts for publication.

> They were very defective, teeming with clumsy, disconnected harmonies, shocking part-writing, amazingly illogical modulations or intolerably long stretches without ever a modulation, and bad scoring. And yet, most of them proved so fine, original, and live, that it seemed imperative to publish them. To do so without adequately overhauling them would have been senseless, except from the biographical and historical point of view. If Mussorgsky's music retains its vitality for fifty years—that is, until the copyright expires—every publisher will be free to bring out archaeologically correct editions,* the manuscripts having been deposited by me in the Public Library. For the time being, however, what is needed is an edition for practical and artistic purposes, suitable for performance and for those who wish to admire Mussorgsky's genius, not to study his idiosyncrasies and sins against art.[15]

Similar utterances by Rimsky-Korsakof are recorded elsewhere:[33]

> I worship *Boris Godunof* and hate it. I worship it for its originality, power, boldness, independence, and beauty. I hate it for its shortcomings, the roughness of its harmonies, the incoherences in the music.

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* Rimsky-Korsakof was speaking of Russia only. The law as regards unpublished texts or portions of texts varies according to countries; and there are still legal restrictions to the diffusion of the genuine texts of certain works not published by the original owners of the copyright.

But this the people who regard Mussorgsky's weak points as the most significant features of his individuality will never understand (Conversation of 6 April 1892).

Although I know I shall be cursed for so doing, I will revise *Boris*. There are countless absurdities in its harmonies, and at time in its melodies. Unfortunately, Stassof and his followers will never understand (15 April 1893).

I intend to write a circumstantial critical essay on *Boris*, discussing merits and flaws point by point. And only after having revised the whole of Mussorgsky's output shall I feel satisfied. My conscience will be at rest, for I shall have done for his music and memory all that I was capable of doing, and in duty bound to do (11 February 1896).

He was convinced that only people who had "a bad musical ear" could think otherwise (letter to Kruglikof, 18 June, 1897).[35] He might have added to the reasons he gave Yastrebtsef, had he been wishful to add force to his arguments, that his attitude to Mussorgsky's music was no different from his attitude to his own, much of which he overhauled drastically time after time. "No single one of my big works anterior to *A Night in May* (1878) remained unrevised", he points out.[15] Moreover, his views on Mussorgsky's alleged sins against art were those held at that time, and long after, by the whole of musical Russia, barring Vladimir Stassof and those followers of his (probably very few in number) who are referred to in one of the above quotations. And even Stassof, after hearing the revised *Boris*, was so delighted that he started a subscription for a wreath, bearing the inscription 'To the great expounder of Mussorgsky'.

A few people did at some time or other express the view that Rimsky-Korsakof had gone too far; notably Balakiref: "Besides re-scoring *Boris* and correcting harmonies in it (which was quite justifiable), he introduced in it many arbitrary alterations, which disfigured the music. He also spoilt the opera by changing the order of scenes."*

But until after the First World War and the Russian Revolution, no single voice arose in Russia to suggest a return to the genuine *Boris* except, strange to say, César Cui's: "Maybe Rimsky-Korsakof's harmonies are softer and more natural, his part-writing better, his scoring more skilful; but the result is not Mussorgsky, nor what Mussorgsky aimed at. The genuine music, with all its shortcomings, was more appropriate. I regret the genuine *Boris*, and feel that should it ever be revived on the stage of the Marinsky Theatre, it is desirable that it should be in the original."

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* Letter to the present writer, 25 July 1906.

Thus, in an article* which he wrote after the production at St. Petersburg of the revised version by the Moscow Private Opera Company (see further, p. 219) did he partly atone, eighteen years after Mussorgsky's death, for his censorious articles and malicious jokes of 1874.

Rimsky-Korsakof began by finishing *Khovanshchina*, casting it into shape, and scoring it (1881-2). He accomplished this difficult task skilfully, even though he altered a good deal of the music ruthlessly. That *Khovanshchina* required, besides the finishing and casting into shape of the last act, a measure of overhauling is unquestionable. Even the most rabid censors of Rimsky-Korsakof's activities as editor of Mussorgsky must grant that *Khovanshchina*, even if Mussorgsky had finished and scored it, could not have stood the test of performance; and that if Rimsky-Korsakof did not achieve the impossible task of giving it the continuity and logic which it lacks, at least he compressed it into a semblance of formal balance, and made it possible to produce. But it will have to be acknowledged, too, that in the genuine *Khovanshchina* there are interesting points and beautiful things which have been swept away in the process of revision.

Then he tackled *A Night on the Bare Mountain*. Using, according to Rimsky-Korsakof,[15] materials from the earliest version for piano and orchestra (now lost) and from the two choral versions composed for *Mlada* and *The Sorotchintsi Fair* (but not, it would seem, Mussorgsky's own orchestral version of 1867, at the time in Balakiref's keeping) he turned out an orchestral tone-poem which for many years remained the only known form of the work. Afterwards he dealt with a number of the songs, including the *Songs and Dances of Death*, which had not been left unfinished, but which he thought fit to edit before publication.

He started his work on *Boris* in 1892, by re-scoring the coronation scene. Hearing this arrangement performed in 1893, he was delighted, and felt stronger than ever in his resolve to revise the whole score. He tackled the remainder of it in 1895, and the new version (a considerably abridged one) was given for the first time at St. Petersburg, in the hall of the Conservatoire, on 28 November

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* In the *Novosti*, No. 67, 1899.

1896, by the Obshchestvo Muzykalnykh Sobranyi (a designation best translated 'Music Society' or 'Music Club'). It was a great success. Later he prepared a new revision, comprising the whole of the 1874 vocal score, except for a few bars at the beginning of Act ii, plus a certain amount of music of his own composition in the coronation scene and at the end of Act iii. His last words on the matter, in his Memoirs, were: "If ever people come to the conclusion that the genuine text is finer than my revision, they will cast this revision aside and give *Boris* in the original."

No doubt they applied, in his mind, to his revisions of other works of Mussorgsky's too. He died on 7 June 1908, nineteen days after the first performance of *Boris Godunof* outside Russia (Paris Opera, his revision being used; see p. 222).

It is doubtful whether any of the denunciatory articles that had appeared in the French Press reached him. The virulent and contemptuous tone of some of these would certainly have pained him, however sure he felt that he was in the right, and indeed that without his intervention Mussorgsky's music might have sunk into permanent oblivion.

That there seemed to be some danger of this happening—at least so long as this music remained unknown outside Russia—is undeniable (see Findeisen's article of 1896, quoted p. 221). Produced for the first time in Moscow at the Grand Theatre on 16 December 1888, *Boris* was received with favour by the public, but won little praise from the critics. One of these, however, Simon Kruglikof, an experienced and cultured judge, devoted several long and thoughtful articles to it in various journals, proclaiming that it was a duty to study and assess the music with all possible care, "especially as many people were doing their utmost to obscure and belittle Mussorgsky's gigantic talent and originality". Although he did not approve of all the liberties the composer had taken with usage, he praised the "fascinating beauty" of many of his harmonies, showed sensitiveness and acumen in his analysis of the music (far more circumstantial and judicious than any previous criticism of it) and concluded with the assertion that Mussorgsky's artistic policy fully justified itself.*

On the other hand, there was in Moscow a strong opposition to Mussorgsky's music. Tchaikovsky, while acknowledging that it did not lack power, deplored its clumsiness and ugliness. Serge Taneief (who at the time was the Director of the Conservatoire) loathed and derided it. There is no reason to suppose that the opinion held by those two influential composers affected the fortunes of *Boris*. But the fact remains that it had but a short run—ten performances, the last of which took place on 12 January 1890.

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* The articles are quoted or summarized by V. Yakovlef.[26]

The Rimsky-Korsakof revision was given at the Solodovnikof Theatre, Moscow, in 1898, by the opera company maintained by the millionaire art-lover Mamontof, Shaliapin appearing for the first time as Tsar Boris. This event sealed for many years the fate of Mussorgsky's original, so marvellously did the great singer and actor identify himself with the part and stamp it with his personality.

A consequence was that Bessel, the holder of the copyright, published the score and parts of the revision but, owing to lack of demand, ignored the genuine text, the manuscript full score of which (minus certain portions of the initial version, in private possession) remained shelved in the library of the Imperial Theatres until 1925, when Professor Lamm was entrusted by the Soviet State Publishing Department with the task of preparing it for publication.

Still, while the revision was gaining ground, tribute was now and then paid to the original. In 1906, for instance, the Moscow critic Kashkin, who after the 1888 production had been lukewarm in his appreciation, wrote in the *Russkaya Mysl* (May number): "Many of Rimsky-Korsakof's corrections have done away with the character and expressive power of Mussorgsky's music. Whoever wishes to know *Boris Godunof* intimately must turn to the 1874 edition, and compare the text with Rimsky-Korsakof's revision. While paying fair and full tribute to the mastery displayed in the latter, I am compelled to say that I regret the disappearance of much that was strong and original." Liadof, too, when preparing his edition of excerpts from *The Sorotchintsi Fair* had remarked: "It is easy enough to correct Mussorgsky's irregularities. The only trouble is that when this is done, the character and originality of the music are done away with, and the composer's individuality vanishes."

But on the whole, the only doubt that appears to have arisen in the minds of those who compared originals and revisions seems to have been which was the lesser of two evils: Rimsky-Korsakof's palliative measures and embellishments or Mussorgsky's clumsiness and roughness. And the scales are seen to turn in the reviser's favour.

It was in France that the movement in Mussorgsky's favour began, as early as 1896, with the first lecture concerts given by Pierre d'Alheim and Marie Olenine d'Alheim; the first country outside Russia in which *Boris Godunof* was performed (although only in Rimsky-Korsakof's version, as everywhere else), the only country outside Russia in which the comparative merits of the genuine *Boris* as then known (1874 version) and of Rimsky-Korsakof's arrangement were extensively discussed before 1920 or so.

Long before the d'Alheim couple began their propaganda, interest in Mussorgsky's music had arisen in Paris owing to the entirely accidental circumstances that Saint-Saëns, in 1874, had brought back from Russia a copy of the vocal score of *Boris Godunof* (published that very year). This copy fell into the hands of a keen music-lover named Jules de Brayer, who was greatly impressed and vainly sought to arouse interest in the work. Later he found a fellow enthusiast in the person of Robert Godet, and the two jointly embarked upon a study of all the works of Mussorgsky which they were able to get hold of (not an easy task at that time). It was through them that Pierre d'Alheim and his wife became acquainted with Mussorgsky's music. But until 1896 very little occurred in the way of public propaganda and discussion.

Curiously, the earliest real vindication of Mussorgsky's genius to have appeared in France is to be found not in any musical journal or book on music, but in the course of a review of Russian periodicals in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* (15 May 1894), from the pen of the very versatile, well informed and sensitive critic, Teodor de Wyzewa.* Referring to an essay on Mussorgsky in a Russian monthly, he declared that Mussorgsky was the most original, the most gifted, and the most truly Russian of Russian composers; and he spoke in glowing terms of the power, simplicity and touching beauty of *Boris*. These things he wrote at the very moment when Rimsky-Korsakof was preparing his first 'revision' in Russia of Mussorgsky's masterpiece.

Two years later, d'Alheim's book, *Mussorgsky*, appeared in Paris; and seven concert-lectures given by him and his wife took that city by storm. D'Alheim was no music critic, and made no pretence of being one. He sought neither to analyse nor to dis-

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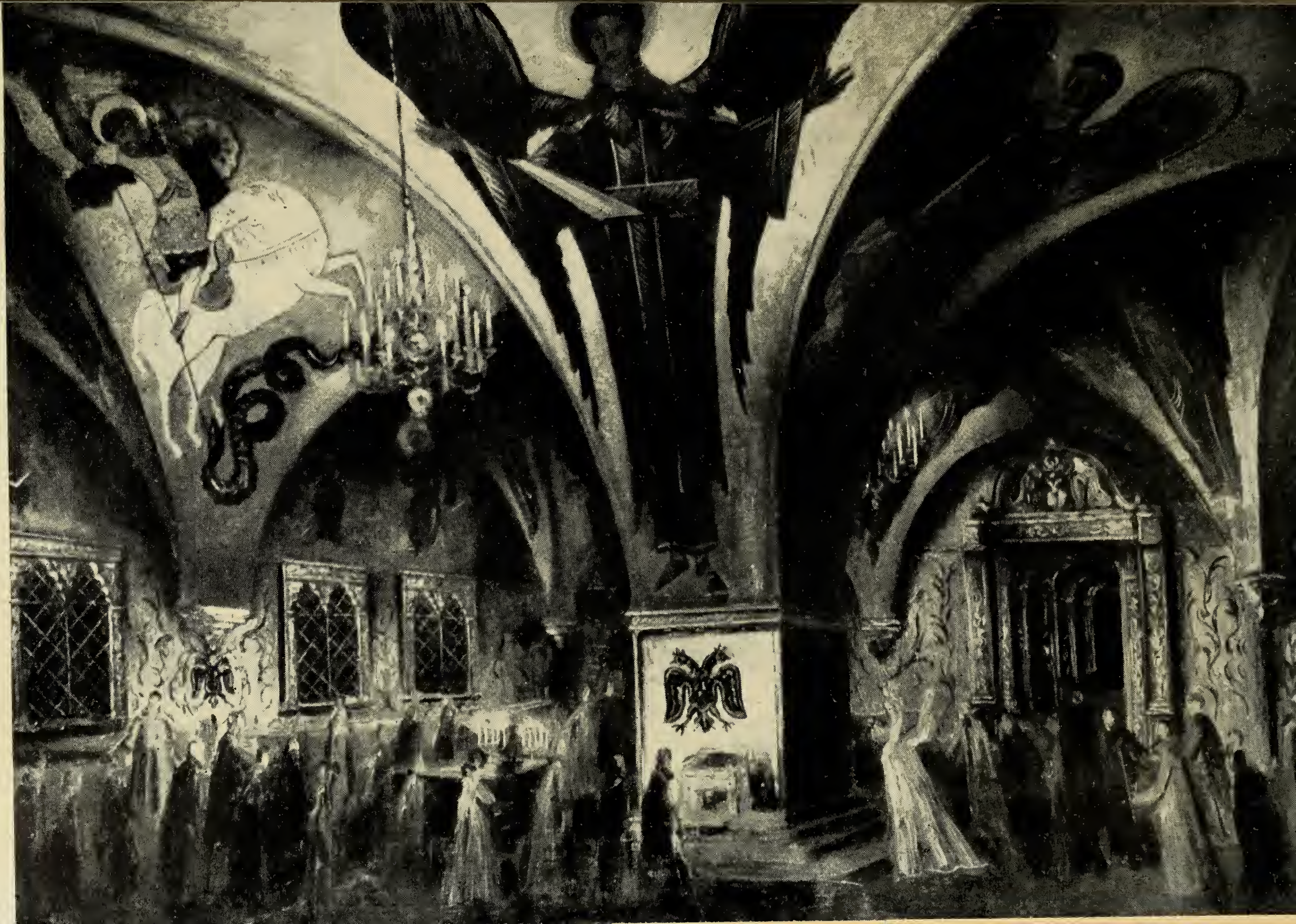
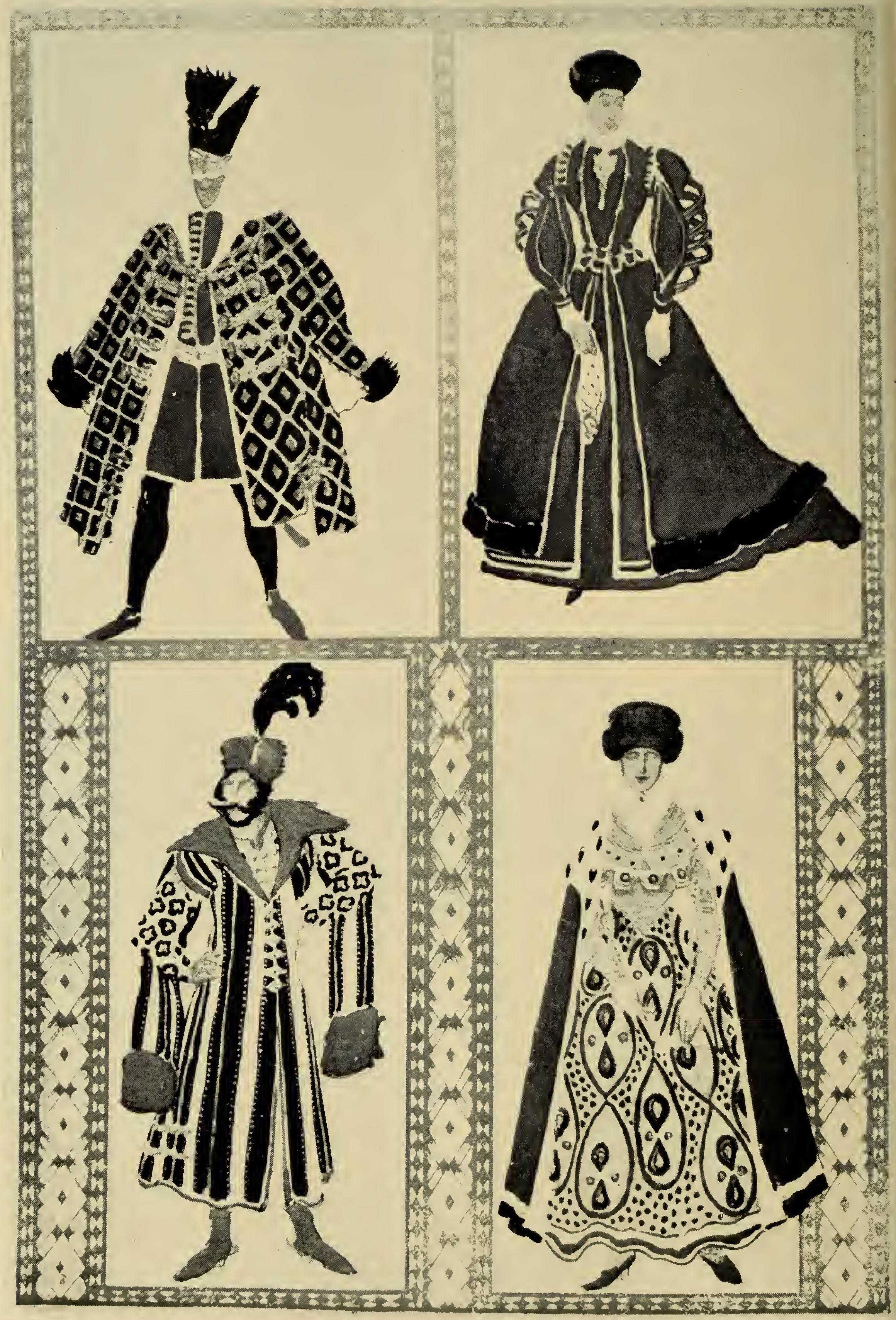
* T. de Wyzewa (1862-1917), founder of the French *Revue Wagnérienne*, and author of various books on music, of which the most important is a big one on Mozart, in collaboration with G. de Saint-Foix.



Coronation
scene from
Boris Godunof



Costume designs by Léon Bakst for *Boris Godunof* cuss Mussorgsky's works: he introduced them, briefly described them, and more especially the atmosphere and setting in which they had cropped up. Madame d'Alheim, the admirable singer—ably assisted by the pianist, Charles Foerster—introduced comprehensive selections of the works, and enthusiasm rose to a high pitch. Among the first to praise Mussorgsky's genius were the composers Bourgault-Ducoudray, Alfred Bruneau, Chausson; the philosophers, R. Barson and Jean Izoulet; novelists, poets, and even professional music critics. The ball thus set rolling did not stop. Mussorgsky recitals by Madame d'Alheim became a usual, eagerly awaited feature of every concert season, and the list of articles devoted to Mussorgsky kept steadily increasing.

How very deeply this attitude of French musical circles contrasted with the attitude current in Russia is clearly evidenced by the following lines from an article in the *Russkaya Muzykalnaya Gazeta* for April 1896, written by the editor, Findeisen:

> When telegrams from Paris acquainted the Russian public with the fact that music by Mussorgsky had been performed with great success, they were very much bewildered, and thought it very strange that even a few eccentric Frenchmen should have been found to evince interest in music which we Russians have cast aside as worthless. But meanwhile, the eccentric Frenchmen think it no less strange that we should neglect our native art, and even strive to obliterate it, while more progressive nations are striving to take it in and propagate it. Very probably they compare us to those inhabitants of Laputa, whom Swift describes as so absorbed in self-admiration, that they notice nothing around them until they are awakened by someone hitting them on the head with a bladder.

Interest and enthusiasm kept on increasing; and most of the people acquainted before 1908 with the published vocal scores of *Boris Godunof* were definitely in favour of the unrevised text of 1874, and disliked Rimsky-Korsakof's revision. Copies of the 1874 edition were comparatively plentiful in France, despite the trouble in procuring them; and a good many private performances of excerpts of the work took place in the homes of music-lovers.

Among writings on Mussorgsky that appeared during the last part of this first period (i.e., before the first performance of *Boris* in Paris) special interest attaches to the brief but warm and illuminating tribute paid to him by Debussy:

> Il est unique et le demeurera par son art sans procédés, sans formules

desséchants. Jamais une sensibilité plus raffinée ne s'est traduite par des moyens aussi simples. Cela se tient et se compose par petites touches successives, reliées par un lien mystérieux et par un don de lumineuse clairvoyance.*

Despite the spread of the movement, however, it is impossible to say how long Paris would have had to wait for *Boris Godunof* but for the initiative taken by Diaghilef in producing the work in 1908. The text used was Rimsky-Korsakof's 'revision' with many curtailments and additional inversions of scenes.† But, by way of compensation, copies of the 1874 edition were distributed among the principal music critics, with the result that a violent hue and cry arose against the reviser. For instance, in *La Liberté*, Gaston Carraud wrote: "Rimsky-Korsakof's alterations are the most needless, incomprehensible and revolting thing ever done in a similar line. Like an insect pest, he has gnawed away every characteristic detail in the work—everything that struck him as irregular because he was incapable of penetrating its logic."

In *Le Mercure de France*, Jean Marnold declared: "No words could be harsh enough to pass adequate censure upon the shameful havoc wrought by Rimsky-Korsakof. The clumsiness and ineptitude of his alterations suggest the mentality of a superannuated impresario or professional librettist. It is utterly wrong to allege that Mussorgsky lacked technique, and that *Boris* could not be performed without Rimsky-Korsakof's alterations.‡ The instinct which guided his sensitiveness and his genius was a safer guide than any 'rule' could be. Let us now produce in Paris the genuine text of *Boris* and produce it in full."

Many other articles expressing the same wish appeared.

Of course, critics were not unanimous in their praise of Mussorgsky in general or of *Boris Godunof* in particular. An opinion hardly more favourable than Cui's is to be found, for instance, in Pougin's *La Musique en Russie*. And there is the curious case of Pierre Lalo, who after having been one of the early champions of Mussorgsky, gradually became less enthusiastic, and in 1913 wrote: "After the novelty of *Boris Godunof* has worn off, one becomes acutely conscious of the work's defects—first of all, the lack of order and consistency. *Boris* consists of separate pieces: no dramatic logic and no musical orderliness establishes an organic connection between them. Even the musical idiom is often incoherent, and the music adds very little to the words."

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* *Revue Blanche*, 15 April 1901.

† It had been suggested to him by the present writer, who was one of his assistants, that he should use the genuine version. The suggestion could not be considered because the company had learnt the revised version, and the score and parts of the original were not available.[16]

‡ Marnold was going by the 1874 vocal score only: obviously neither he nor any other French critic could gain access to the original full score.

A curious consequence of the introduction to musical Paris of Korsakof's version instead of the original was that Vincent d'Indy, writing on *Boris* in *Art Moderne* (7 June 1908) mentioned among Mussorgsky's devices, "glissandi of the harps, and muted trumpets"—which is very amusing, considering that in the genuine *Boris* the glissando of the harp is used on only one occasion, and there is no single muted note of the trumpet or of any other brass instrument. D'Indy also considered that "in nearly all the essential scenes of *Boris* music vanishes almost entirely, leaving everything to the tender mercies of the actor".

The year 1908 was marked by the publication in Paris of two books—one by the present writer, the other by Madame Olenine d'Alheim, *Le Legs de Mussorgsky*. Otherwise nothing of special importance occurred until 1922, when Robert Godet—seven and thirty years after his first enthusiastic contact with Mussorgsky—entered the lists with his article, 'Les Deux Boris' in the *Revue Musicale*, violently inveighing against Korsakof's revision. Godet's campaign, conducted in England as well as in France, culminated in the publication of his two volumes, *En Marge de Boris Godunof** and the reprint under his editorship† of the 1874 vocal score of *Boris* (which had been unprocurable since 1914). Thus, about a twelve-month before the first publication of the full genuine text of *Boris Godunof*, ended what may be called the second period of the history of Mussorgsky's works in France.

As regards England, there is no need to mark any divisions in the period anterior to 1926. In point of fact, in England, very little was known of Mussorgsky until 1910, when Madame d'Alheim carried to London her admirable propaganda. But from that time on, headway was made fairly rapidly: both on the occasion of Madame d'Alheim's recitals and of the first performance in England of *Boris Godunof* in 1913 by the Diaghilef company, criticism set to work in earnest.

The earliest assessment of Mussorgsky worth recording is uncomprisingly unfavourable. It is from the pen of Edward Dannreuther and occurs in the *Oxford History of Music**: "Mussorgsky, in his vocal efforts, appears wilfully eccentric. His style impresses the Western ear as barbarously ugly." In these few words is Mussorgsky judged and cast aside. In justice to Dannreuther, who was a scholarly and conscientious writer, it should be recalled that in his preface to the volume in which those lines occur, he refers to "the impossibility, in dealing with the actualities of contemporary musical life, to avoid the expression of disputable criticism". However, the verdict, occurring in so very authoritative a work of reference as the *Oxford History of Music*, may have discouraged not a few would-be students of Mussorgsky's music.

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* London: Chester, 1926.

† ib., 1927.

Among the early writers who expressed favourable views on Mussorgsky should be numbered Richard Capell (*Musical Standard*, 1909), Arthur Symons, and Mrs. Rosa Newmarch. The last-named, who conducted an active propaganda for Russian music generally and was generous in her praise of it, had a good deal to say in favour of Mussorgsky. Her attitude was from the first altogether eclectic; and with regard to *Boris Godunof* she was definitely in favour of Rimsky-Korsakof's arrangement. In an article in the *Musical Times*, July 1913, she wrote: "When the question cropped up of producing Mussorgsky's operas, even Stassof, I feel sure, realized how needful was a revision, failing which Mussorgsky's original scores, despite their potential greatness, ran the risk of becoming mere archaeological curiosities." And in her book of 1914, *Russian Opera*, she describes not the genuine *Boris* but the revised version, with the scene in the cell placed before the coronation, and the Polish act before the scene in the Tsar's apartments—adding that she for one very much doubted whether it would be wise to give up Korsakof's arrangements in favour of the originals.

Among the most interesting articles published when *Boris* was first performed in London, one by E. A. Baughan† may be quoted for the warmth of its praise as well as for the remarkable analogy between its restrictions and those made by d'Indy and Lalo. The composer, Baughan says, "is a genius, not only as a musician but as a poet and seer, a regenerator of music-drama". He considers, however, that "the methods of *Boris Godunof* do not give full scope to music", and goes so far as to aver that "in such works as *Boris* music does nothing which could not have been done as impressively by speech". But he described both *Boris* and *Khovanshchina* as "wonderful examples of dramatic insight and artistic sincerity". And concerning the structure of *Boris* he very aptly remarks: "It is alleged in proof of the looseness of structure of Mussorgsky's libretti that whole scenes can, and have been, omitted or transposed without apparently making any difference. The argument betokens a very inadequate understanding of the nature of Mussorgsky's music-dramas. The looseness of their structure is, in reality, an absolute merit, as it enables the composer to express the central ideas of the drama without being bound hand and foot by the dramatic situations."

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* Vol vi, 1905.

† *Fortnightly Review*, September 1913.

This constituted a very telling reply to an argument which also cropped up in England under the pen of Mr. Ernest Newman,* who found few merits in Mussorgsky's music, but many grave defects. He considered him "a much smaller figure than he is in the eyes of even thoroughly competent admirers . . . only half a musician in the sense in which we apply the word to Wagner and Strauss or even Gluck and Weber"; and he esteemed that time had amply confirmed Tchaikovsky's unfavourable verdict of 1879. His conclusions are: "Mussorgsky was an amateur with moments of genius. When he was not out of his depth, he could be extraordinarily poignant. He had the amateur's unconstrained way of saying just what came into his head, and just as it came there. . . . His untrained genius hit upon a number of what were, for the time being, harmonic innovations, and found new accents and a new naturalness for certain dramatic emotions. . . . Whether they are sufficient to atone for his general shapelessness and thinness of tissue, we may have our doubts."

Writing in 1923 on the songs in the *Musical Times*, Mr. Newman again lay stress on Mussorgsky's amateurishness, and concluded his survey by quoting Tchaikovsky's verdict. But in the *Sunday Times* of 23 December 1934 he wrote: "In the generation of about 1860–90, the unquestionably great composers of which Europe could boast were Wagner, Brahms, Berlioz, Mussorgsky and Verdi."

On the whole, a respectable amount of critical or semi-critical literature on Mussorgsky cropped up in England during the years immediately preceding the 1914–18 war, and at irregular intervals after the war. A great proportion of it, of course, is not particularly significant (among the exceptions should be mentioned a fine article by H. C. Colles in the *Musical Times* of August 1912, dealing with the song-cycle *Sunless*). But in bulk it was, in its time, a valuable contribution to the study of a composer whose music attracted little attention in most other countries; and it paved the way for further progress. There can be no doubt that, had it been possible at the moment to know Mussorgsky better—few of his works were procurable with English translations, no copies of the 1874 edition of *Boris* seem to have reached England—progress would have been far speedier. And yet when the Chester reprint of the 1874 *Boris* appeared, it attracted little attention among critics, even among those who had previously pointed out the desirability of comparing Mussorgsky's original music with the Korsakof arrangement.

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* *The Nation*, 13 June 1914.

It was later that German critics began to display interest in the works of the national Russian school—for instance, in those of Borodin and Rimsky-Korsakof. To Balakiref they still pay very little attention. And they practically overlooked Mussorgsky until the beginning of the 1930's. The only article of any importance to have appeared before the 1914 war seems to be one by Oskar von Riesemann*. This may be due to the fact that the d'Alheim campaign did not extend to that country. However, echoes of the lecture-concerts of 1896 reached Germany in the shape of notices sent in by the Paris correspondents of several big newspapers. For example, in the *Berliner Börsen Kurier* (31 March 1896), it was pointed out that Russia showed a strange lack of interest in Mussorgsky, and that Russian critics seemed systematically to avoid praising his music "for fear of conveying a false idea of Russian art", which is a very shrewd definition of an attitude that continued long after. So that attention having been called to Mussorgsky at a time when practically nobody outside Russia knew anything of him, German criticism might have made an early start. As it turned out, however, nothing of the kind occurred. Let it be remembered again that at the time and long after, copies of Mussorgsky's works were not easily procurable, the Russian publisher having made no attempt to circulate these works abroad.

In his article of 1907, von Riesemann described *Boris Godunof* as the most significant of Russian operas. As regards the genuine text of the work, he conveyed a false impression by the following ambiguous sentence: "Unfortunately, the full score of *Boris Godunof* in its original form is no longer available (*liegt nicht mehr vor*)", making no mention of the 1874 vocal score. In fact, the question of the genuine *Boris* versus the Rimsky-Korsakof arrangement was left untouched in the German countries until the moment when the 1874 vocal score was reprinted by Bessel, the original publisher, in conjunction with Breitkopf & Härtel (Leipzig) and the Universal Edition (Vienna). By that time (1924), many critics had become interested in Mussorgsky's output; and not a few started inquiring into the facts of his case. Among the keenest partisans of the genuine text of *Boris Godunof* should be mentioned Egon Wellesz, whose article in the *Musikblätter des Anbruch* (March 1925) concludes with the words: "Mussorgsky's genius is fully entitled to speak without the assistance of a middle-man." And Paul Stefan, in the same periodical, wrote shortly afterwards: "The genuine *Boris* is a necessity for the musical world at large."

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* In *Die Musik*, 1907.

Two big books on Mussorgsky which appeared in Germany—Oskar von Riesemann's (Munich, 1926) and Kurt von Wolfurt's (Berlin, 1927)—acquainted for the first time the German-speaking public with the biography of Mussorgsky as revealed by recent Russian research, and with the terms of what is often called the Mussorgsky problem. The authors were able to utilize a wealth of materials, new to non-Russian readers, which had not been available to earlier biographers, for instance, the majority of Mussorgsky's letters; and for this reason their books, in the matter of information, constituted a big advance on what had hitherto been done outside Russia. The same may be said in a measure of Robert Godet's *En Marge de Boris Godunof*. But a strange fate befalls all writing on Mussorgsky published outside Russia. No sooner do these appear than new materials concerning the composer's life, or new musical texts from his pen, crop up; and in consequence the books become inadequate, at least partly, almost as soon as published. For instance, among the revelations of the years 1908–11 were *The Marriage*, the songs contained in the Malherbe manuscript *Years of Youth*, the letters to Stassof and to Rimsky-Korsakof, etc. Von Riesemann's, Godet's and von Wolfurt's books appeared shortly before the publication of the genuine full text of *Boris*.

The very fact that none of the three authors, referring to the initial version of *Boris*, says much about it, might be enough to convey the impression that this initial version deserves no closer attention. The same remark applies to their references to the passages not included in the published vocal score of 1874: passages among which are, let it be remembered, the important final episode of the first scene, and the particularly significant narrative of Dimitri's murder. In short, at every turn, we find progress more or less impeded by lack of adequate information.

That this deplorable state of things persists is shown by the arrant nonsense that now and then crops up in the musical Press. For instance: "It may be said that he did not finish a single one of his bigger works."* "Long after his death, it was discovered, by chance, that he had composed three operas, which were found among his papers in fragmentary form. Rimsky-Korsakof gave shape to *Boris Godunof* and also *Khovanshchina*."†

After the feeling had spread that Mussorgsky was imperfectly represented in Rimsky-Korsakof's revisions, and that there was something fundamentally wrong in the neglect of the genuine texts, peculiar symptoms of the new frame of mind developed here and there. In 1927 Chester's, the London publishers, who had issued a reprint of the 1874 vocal score, commissioned the English composer, Eugene Goossens, to orchestrate excerpts from it, which were performed in England. A couple of years earlier, a Latvian composer, Meligailis by name, orchestrated the whole opera from the same 1874 vocal score, and this version was performed at Riga.

In those days, the genuine full score was still unprocurable. But in 1933, five years after it had been published by the Russian State Editions in association with the Oxford University Press, a still stranger notion, according to the Dortmund correspondent of the Berlin *Musik*, occurred to a German producer: "The apex of our opera season was the production of *Boris Godunof*. Felix Wolfes sought to do away with the smoothness imparted to the work by Rimsky-Korsakof, and to bring out the relation of the music to Russian folk-music. This he did by reassembling the rhythms (*durch rhythmische Umgruppierungen*) and by characteristic alterations of the scoring."‡

It was in the spring of 1925 that the first notices of the forthcoming Lamm edition of the genuine *Boris* in both versions (plus footnotes indicating the cuts that differentiate the 1874 vocal score from the 1872 version) appeared in the Russian Press, the beginning of a series in which most of Mussorgsky's other works are available by now.

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* Leonid Sabaneev, in *Musical Times*, April 1931.

† L. von Ungern-Sternberg: *Signale*, 27 November 1935—that is, seven years after the publication of the Lamm edition of *Boris*.

‡ E. A. Schneider, in *Die Musik*, March 1933.

From that moment on, controversy assumed big proportions. The Rimsky-Korsakof versus Mussorgsky question is not yet settled. When it first arose it was the only one of its kind within the ken of the musical world, although parallels were to be found in the sphere of the other arts (Schiavonetti's engravings of Blake's drawings, with the faults corrected; Shakespeare's plays with the order of the scenes changed, and portions of the text transferred from one character to another, *The Merchant of Venice* ending with the trial scene, etc.). Since then, a good many have cropped up and been discussed: Bruckner's symphonies in their various versions, Mahler's version of Wolf's *Corregidor*, the two versions of Wolf's *Penthesilea*; and Mottl's revision of Peter Cornelius's *The Barber of Baghdad*. Each one, after the facts have been fully ascertained, has to be considered from no less than three distinct points of view: the ethical, the aesthetical, and the practical.

Dealing with the revision of *The Barber of Baghdad*, the German critic, Peter Raabe, arrived at conclusions that are of general value:

> To revise is wrong so far as it means altering the music because one does not like it. It may be right so far as it means doing away with purely technical shortcomings originating in the composer's lack of knowledge or experience. In other words, a reviser has no right to interfere in his capacity as a composer—arbitrarily to alter harmonies, rhythms, melodic patterns, to thicken or thin inner parts, and so on. So long as the genuine *Barber* remained unknown, everybody found Mottl's version delightful. Now that we know the original, we see that he altered its colour-scheme and style.*

Rimsky-Korsakof did not feel that he was acting in his capacity as a composer when he altered Mussorgsky's consecutive fifths or "appalling" modulations. Yet there can be no doubt that he was. Thickening or thinning inner parts may come very near doing away with purely technical shortcomings. Lamm and his co-editor Boris Assafief, whose scrupulousness is exemplary, did consider it desirable to add here and there a note or two (very few in all, and all marked by brackets and footnotes) to the inner parts of *Boris*. Still, despite the occasional difficulty of deciding where to stop in borderline cases, the principle holds good; and accordingly a large proportion of Rimsky-Korsakof's alterations stand condemned.

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* Abridged from article in *Deutsche Musik-Kultur*, August-September 1937.

From the ethical point of view, there can be no doubt that the composer's ultimate decision should be accepted as final. The facts and arguments adduced in the debates on the Bruckner case have shown how difficult it can be to determine what a composer's ultimate decision was, and whether it was not taken under pressure, or for special reasons on a special occasion, and so forth. The question does not arise with regard to Rimsky-Korsakof's revisions made after Mussorgsky's death; but it does with regard to the two genuine forms of *Boris*, and also to the cuts made between 1874 and 1881. The people who proclaim that the 1874 vocal score settles the question of the final form of *Boris* because it is the only printed version that was sanctioned by the composer may be right in principle. But if the principle is carried to its logical conclusion, they should accept as part and parcel of Mussorgsky's ultimate decision the cuts practised before the first performance and sanctioned by his presence at the rehearsals and his letter to Napravnik, thanking him for his excellent advice.

The following remarks[32] will show that even the evidence afforded by his manuscripts is sometimes perplexing:

> The Mussorgsky autographs in the Leningrad public library represent practically the whole of his output; and these autographs shed light on his methods of composition. There are practically no rough drafts. From the earliest to the latest, clear drafts, in beautiful calligraphy, ending with date and signature with flourish, plus, at times, quaintly worded particulars as to place and circumstances of composition. One may confidently aver that we have neither preliminary drafts nor drafts unmistakably representing final states, approved as such by the composer. Whenever dissimilar texts are available, each variant gives the impression of an improvisation substituted for another improvisation. This suggests that while he had a firm, clear basic notion of what he wanted to do, a certain latitude was left in his mind for oscillation, so to speak, in the carrying out. Hence differences, at times considerable, at other times minute.

This conclusion is justified in the main. The term 'oscillation', however, hardly covers differences as great as those between the two versions of 'Little Star' and 'Saul'. It is a curious fact that some of the dissimilar clear drafts of songs should bear the same date—for instance, the two of 'Yeremushka's Lullaby' (Lamm edition, pp. 52 ff. and 56 ff. both "16 March 1868"), 'The Classicist' (ib., pp. 34 ff. and 38 ff. both "30 December 1867"), and 'The Orphan' (ib., pp. 46 ff, and 49 ff., both "13 January 1868").*

Judgments founded on purely aesthetic grounds differ quite as much. For the early Russian critics of the revisions, Rimsky-Korsakof was invariably right, or almost; for Godet (who spoilt his case by heaping scurrilous abuse upon him), for Marnold, Carraud, and most of the Russian critics of to-day, he was invariably wrong. A majority of critics agree by now that a few of his minor alterations may be to the good in themselves, especially if considered apart from their context; but that, all told, he has deplorably weakened, cheapened, and in some instances positively disfigured, Mussorgsky's music.

Even the subsidiary question, whether the revisions prepared the ground for the ultimate vindication of the genuine texts, remains controversial, although the opinion that they did is widespread and seems reasonable. In Russia they did, without a doubt. But it is admissible that had the original been used for the first production of *Boris* outside Russia (and there is every reason to suppose that Diaghilef, who was in a large measure independent of Russian opinion, would have considered using it had this been possible) its success—hardly a matter of doubt in the Paris of 1908—might have turned the tables in its favour.

Against the old view that most of Mussorgsky's music was healthless until Rimsky-Korsakof intervened, the view that its vitality must have been great indeed for it to have survived despite the alterations has arisen. It is most unfair to Rimsky-Korsakof, but it gains ground every day. During the past ten years or so, a considerable amount of literature on Mussorgsky and his music has appeared, and a body of opinion has been formed, based on genuine criticism and not on mere generalities, slogans, or text-books. It remains to be seen whether the revisions will ultimately be swept away by common consent, or whether a number of experienced judges, either practising musicians or critics, will always be found (as is the case at the time of writing) to prefer these revisions or to flounder forever in a sea of doubt.

Such was the astonishing fate of Mussorgsky's music after 1881. It is no exaggeration to say that, little known during his lifetime in his own country, and quite unknown elsewhere, he rose to world-wide fame on the strength of compositions not one of which, except for a proportion of the songs and a few minor piano pieces, was known in its genuine form.

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* Mussorgsky's few surviving sketches and rough drafts have been published in Vol. V of the Complete Edition (1939)—*Ed.*

As soon as one tries to imagine the same thing happening to a writer, a painter, a sculptor, or an architect, one realizes the enormity, the topsy-turviness of it all; and at the same time it flashes upon the mind that it simply could not happen, even though it is open to doubt whether a reason of principle can be found for ruling out the possibility of remodellings by an alien hand being finer than the originals. It is amazing enough that it should have happened to a composer, although music is of all the arts the one whose relation to the human intellect (as distinct from the imagination) and action upon the imagination and feelings are the most mysterious. Intuition alone can decide whether changes that seem to be, in principle, innocuous, or even positively beneficial, are not detrimental in actual fact. Substitute one artist's (or critic's) intuition for another's and a contrary verdict may ensue (e.g. Liadof's for Rimsky-Korsakof's). As has been pointed out again and again—notably by Kashkin in his article of 1906—Rimsky-Korsakof's nature and outlook were fundamentally different from Mussorgsky's. For him, "an opera was first and foremost a musical composition".

After Mussorgsky's death, Stassof decided that *The Marriage* should not be published forthwith. In the obituary of 1881, he gave his reasons thus: "Now that Mussorgsky is no more, I shall do not as I please, but as I must. I deposit the manuscript with our national public library. . . . For the time being, most people regard it as an intolerable, foolhardy, wanton experiment. A day will come when a different view will be taken."

He made it a condition that the manuscript should remain unavailable for inspection for a term of years. In 1906, shortly before his death, he agreed to a suggestion made by Rimsky-Korsakof that publishing should be considered, with the result that it appeared at the end of 1908.

His seemingly high-handed and arbitrary decision to secrete the manuscript proved justified by the event. There is no denying that there was no chance of the one act having a run of performances, and that the Russian musical world would have shown but little interest in it. But when it appeared at last, it was found so attractive and racy that, eventually, Ippolitof-Ivanof undertook to finish the work, so that it could gain access to the stage.* Since then, according to notes that appeared in the Press, two other composers have undertaken the same task: one a Russian, Alexander Tcherepnin, and the other a Dutchman, Daniel Ruijneman.

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* Russian State Editions, 1931.

CHAPTER XVI

TECHNIQUE AND STYLE (I)

Influence of Russian folk-music—Its modes, scales, and rhythms—Native part-singing—Harmonization problems—The question of Mussorgsky's technical ability and musical feeling

MANY features of Mussorgsky's idiom and style have already been mentioned, and some of them examined, the lines along which a methodical study should proceed being thereby indicated. Obviously, every one of the idiosyncrasies discovered should be considered, first of all, in relation to the composer's national ambitions, since we know he wished his music to be thoroughly Russian, not only in respect of vocal intonation, delivery, rise and fall, lilt, and expression, but even in purely musical evocations cf. chapter V, p. 73, his letter to Nikolsky on *A Night on the Bare Mountain*), and also that his musical idiom and style were formed under the influence of Russian, and especially Great-Russian, folk music.

Afterwards will come the question of realism, since he aimed at a maximum of accuracy, simplicity, and specificness, and did not believe in the quest of beauty for beauty's sake, his ideal being what we have termed a minimum of stylization together with a maximum of differentiation.

These two principles, with all the consequences they entailed in Mussorgsky's actual practice, help to account for many of the idiosyncrasies of his style, although, of course, not for all. The surprising thing is that this line of investigation yields far more numerous, definite, and useful results than might be expected, considering how easy it is in matters such as musical nationalism and realism to proceed from vague generalities to loose generalizations.

On the question of specific Russian intonation, of the influence of Russian speech on Mussorgsky's music, it is not possible to say much here: long disquisitions on points of comparative linguistics, phonetics and parlance would be needful. Let it be mentioned, however, by way of indication, that the Russian language is strongly accented. The tonic accent plays a big part in it, but does not stand out as much as it does in German—a comparison with the Italian would be nearer the mark. It can occur on any syllable, even the second of a six-syllable word. Secondary accents are few, and never strong; and the difference between long syllables and short is never as great as in Italian. All this makes for suppleness of delivery. Russian also lends itself to emphatic and pathetic accents, sharp rather than prolonged, and is richer in colour and variety of inflexion than any other European non-Latin language. It has fine open vowel sounds; and the consonants, including the combinations of them that appear so strange to Western Europeans, are never harsh or unwieldy.

Mussorgsky had ideas of his own on the effects to be achieved by using certain vowel sounds. Stassof records, for instance, that he wished the Latin hymn sung by the Jesuits in the revolution scene in *Boris Godunof* to contain as many 'i's' and 'u's' as possible, "in order the better to suggest their humble and timorous attitude". It is not always possible to decide whether such extreme subtleties are as effective as he imagined them to be. Although extremely sensitive to the sound of words, he did not often resort to artifices of that order. He was not interested in the alliterative effects dear to Wagner. Vowel alliterations, as it happens, are unavoidable in the Russian language; many of those that occur in texts set to music by Mussorgsky (including the texts written by himself) are most effective, and might appear to have been deliberately arrived at, although this is seldom the case. Naturally, hardly anything of all this could be realized from translations of his vocal works; and the whole question of the correspondences in pace, rise and fall, cadences, and so on, that exist between his musical invention and Russian parlance is bound to remain a sealed book to non-Russians. Anybody can see, however, to how great an extent his recitative differs from that of any other master, Italian, French, or German, ancient or contemporary; and that his melodies, even when their relation to vernacular folk-tunes is not obvious, are very different from those we find in Schubert, Schumann, Berlioz, Bellini or Verdi. It should be added that even in Russian music, no parallel is to be found. His purely lyrical melodies show affinities with Glinka's; but his recitative remains unique—owing as, already mentioned, little to Dargomyjsky's (the point will be elaborated presently), and being impossible to imitate closely enough to create an illusion of the real thing. His Russian critics agree in describing Mussorgsky as the one and only composer whose musical thinking was invariably governed by the influence of everyday Russian speech.

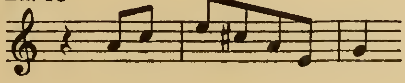
The influence on him of native folk-music is far easier to explain. A few general considerations may help to clear the way. In all countries, folk-music and church-music provided the basis of art forms and styles. In Western Europe the art of musical composition was born early and progressed gradually. Culture-music evolved apart from folk-music, pursuing a course of its own which led up to the great art forms of the modern period. And in the course of this evolution, it renounced the old modes of church- and folk-music in favour of the major-minor system, which became the very foundation of these great art forms. But nothing of this had affected Russia: she had had no culture-music of her own until late in the eighteenth century. So the nineteenth-century composers—beginning with Glinka, who longed "to give his fellow-countrymen music in which they would feel thoroughly at home"—had to cope, on the one hand, with the necessity to resort to art forms originating in a tradition in the establishing and maintaining of which Russia had taken no part; and on the other hand, with the impulse to remain faithful to the long and strong tradition of the native music which surrounded them, which was to them a close and live reality, and which pointed in a different direction. They had to effect a reconciliation, an adjustment between these two driving forces. They tried to do what normally would have been the work of many generations. Since Western theory and usage ignored the modal scales and their potentialities, the technique of composition, as taught at the time, was of a kind calculated thoroughly to discourage modal leanings and progress in the direction which such leanings naturally suggested. Owing to Mussorgsky's attitude to the rules of composition, he is of all the Russians the one in whose music the idiosyncrasies of the old vernacular music are the most faithfully incorporated or reflected, and most ingeniously and aptly put to use.

Russian folk music is fundamentally modal. Practically all the mediaeval modes appear in it. Consequently, it differs from major-minor music not only in character and colour, but in balance. How far the way in which those modes are used in it conforms to the old modal usage is a point on which specialists disagree, and which need not be examined here; it is a known fact that there is little relation between that old usage and the practice of the modern composers (not all of them Russian) who resort to modal scales. It is interesting to note, on the other hand, that in Russian folk-music the second degree of the scale often plays the part of the dominant—although not, let it be marked, as it would in the major-minor system, in its capacity as a component of the usual dominant harmony. And this same degree may also play the part of the subdominant, as the sixth degree does at times. Naturally, there often is no leading note; and when there is one, it exercises no strong pull. The character, strength and direction of the cadences are determined by these various idiosyncrasies, falling cadences being numerous, and the dominant-tonic full close a rarity. A tune may end, not on the tonic or on the equivalent of the final of old modal usage, but on any other degree—even, as shown by certain analysts, on the seventh which does not imply, as it would in the major-minor system, the harmony of the dominant any more than the second degree does.

The melody may pass from one modal scale to another, abruptly or by means of some simple kind of modulation. It does not always revert to the original scale. Irregular scales corresponding to no particular mode (examples of such scales in Mussorgsky's music are given in the following chapters) do not occur; but there are many instances of defective scales, pentatonic and other; and also of what is termed in this book variable scales—a designation not included in the vocabulary of current theory.

Variable scales are to be found in the folk-music of many countries. One, the melodic minor scale (in which the sixth and seventh degrees vary by a semitone), is included in the Western major-minor system. Another, the scale with the seventh degree varying by a semitone according to the requirements of the moment or the composer's taste, is "a characteristic style feature of the music of the Renaissance and remained current until 1600 or so". Others are used in modern music. A typical instance is provided by the opening theme of Ravel's Sonata for violin and 'cello:

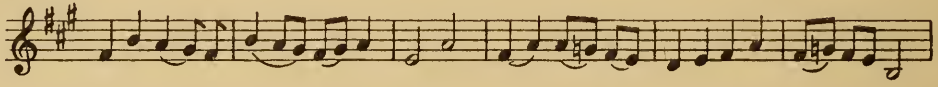
Ex. 43



In variable scales, the changes do not represent extensions of the scheme such as result from the use, in the major, of the lowered sixth degree (minor subdominant harmony), second degree (Neapolitan sixth) and so on. They are not to be regarded as borrowings from related keys, or as marking a temporary modulation, a shifting of the balance; nor as chromatic alterations, passing-notes, grace-notes, or appoggiaturas. On the contrary, both forms will be found to behave as real notes of the scale, exactly as occurs in the above Ravel example.

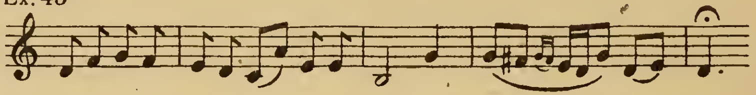
No foolproof method of determination can be suggested. It is almost entirely a question of feel. At times, the distinction between a variable scale and a combination of two scales is so fine that no solution will stand past dispute; but a few borderline cases do not invalidate the principle. In this Russian folk-tune:[30]

Ex. 44



the change to G natural certainly induces a change of mode; but not so in this one:[30]

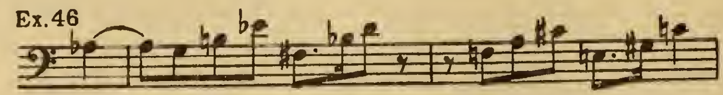
Ex. 45



the change to F sharp.

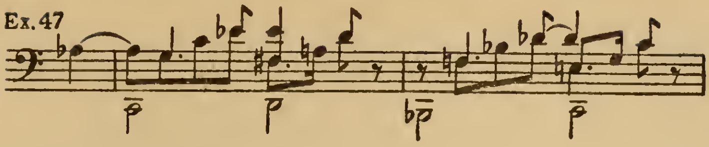
Before proceeding further, it should be mentioned that it is always possible—at least with the help of a few twists—to analyse modal or irregular formations, harmonic or melodic, in terms of ordinary tonality. Practically anything in music can be labelled passing-note or appoggiatura. In a certain German treatise, it is averred that the opening motif in Liszt's *Faust* Symphony:

Ex.46



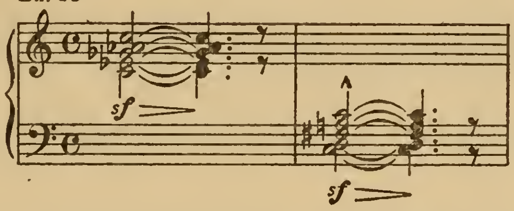
should really be understood as standing for:

Ex. 47



Many theorists deal in a similar spirit with modal formations in modern music, and certain Russian critics incline to do the same with Mussorgsky's melodies and harmonies. Keldysh[25] gravely explains that the opening chords in the coronation scene in *Boris Godunof*:

Ex. 48

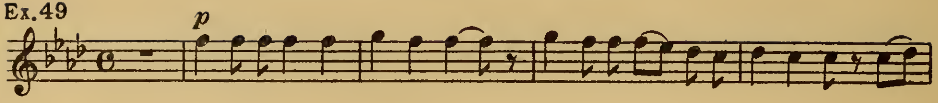


are altered forms of the dominant harmony of C major. Such explanations often amount to stripping the music of its natural character and significance, and, unless one imagines, for instance, that Mussorgsky thought out the Coronation chords in terms of the harmony G B D F and then proceeded to devise condiments and disguises, they are of no help whatever. Often they are as absurd as it would be, when analysing a painting, to say that a certain scarlet is effective for the reason that it is really a magenta. Again the borderline is, at times, difficult to define and easy to overstep. Again it is a question of feel, of going by one's ear and sense of balance, not by text-book definitions or prescriptions.

The above remarks make it clear that Russian folk-tunes do not imply tonal harmonies; and that, indeed, tonal harmonies will often be quite out of keeping. This is true of the folk-music of many countries. These, accordingly, have often been maltreated by composers incapable of thinking except in terms of the major-minor system, "the mode being ignored, and the melody referred to more than one tonic and treated as a patchwork of major and minor keys."[22]

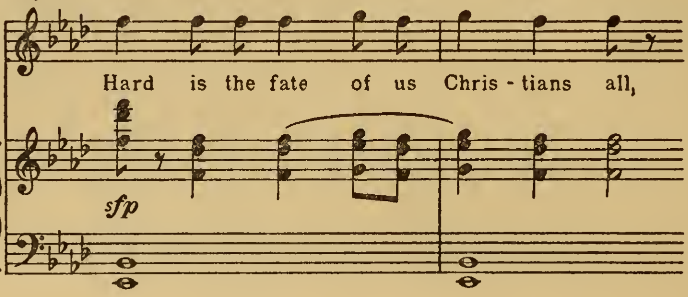
On the other hand, these tunes lend themselves to a variety of harmonizations, modal or not, simple or complex. This property of theirs played a big part in the formation of Mussorgsky's style. One example may serve as illustration. In the revolution scene in *Boris* he uses a folk-tune from the repertory of Riabinin, a Russian minstrel whom he had heard shortly before:

Ex. 49



His treatment of it is a model of simplicity, subtlety, and aptness. He introduces it first over a holding note F, then over the double holding-note F G, and gradually leads up to the harmony:

Ex. 50



that is, a chord of the ninth, passing-notes, and nothing else, but enough to ensure fullness and firmness and to reinforce the driving power of the beautiful tune. There is no need to inquire whether the mode is F aeolian or B flat dorian (G flat and A flat alternate with G and A natural) although it will be noted that the harmonization of the next verse (over the holding-note B flat) tends to confirm the latter interpretation. Mussorgsky, while resorting to a harmonic scheme which, in theory, is not modal in the least, has thoroughly succeeded in safeguarding the modal character of the tune (which, of course, is in F aeolian). Tune and accompaniment might have grown together.*

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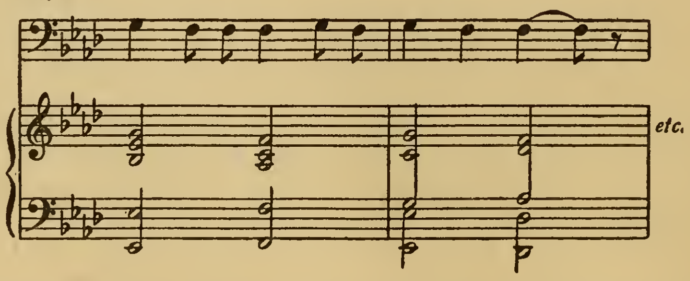
* Compare Rimsky-Korsakof's harmonization of the same tune in *A Hundred Russian Folk-Songs* (1877):

Ex. 51

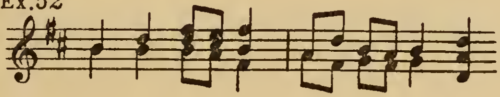


which does away, not only with the colour of the tune, but also with its buoyancy—an extreme case, for he has given us many thoroughly logical and delightful harmonizations of folk-tunes. On this subject, a remark of Lapshin's[16] is worth noting: "Compare the treatment of the folk-tune 'The maiden went through the fields' in *Khovanshchina* [Marfa's love-song] and in Tchaikovsky's *Storm* overture, and you will see that Tchaikovsky, the master technician, who had no sense of folk-music, failed where Mussorgsky, the composer of that *Boris* which Tchaikovsky regarded as 'the vilest and messiest of operas', has given us a lovely gem."

The books of folk-songs with piano accompaniments by Balakiref, Rimsky-Korsakof, Liadof and others show that Russian composers do not agree in the matter of their harmonization. More generally speaking, the question is a complex one, which as often as not has been dealt with one-sidedly. Writers—and especially Western writers—usually commit the error of regarding all Russian folk-tunes as monodies, an error fostered by the above collections. In actual fact a large proportion of these songs are sung chorally, the part-singing being either homophonic or contrapuntal in an elementary way, and passing freely from unison to chords or to contrasting designs and conversely. Often the resulting harmonies seem very strange to the Western ear.

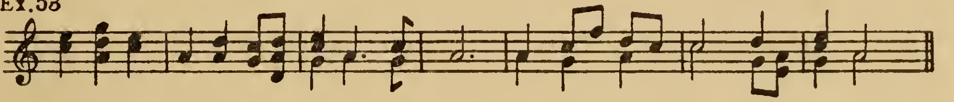
Here is one example of purely harmonic part-writing:*

Ex.52



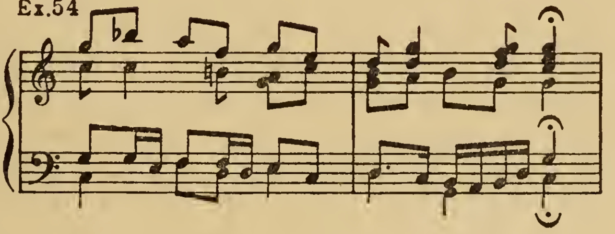
An even more remarkable one, containing chords in fourths (not an isolated example) is:

Ex.53



And here is a typical instance of the kind of counterpoint that is practised:

Ex.54



The parts are nearly always diatonic. Among the very few exceptions, this one is an instance of real chromaticism, fundamentally dissimilar to the chromatic changes in the afore-mentioned variable scales:

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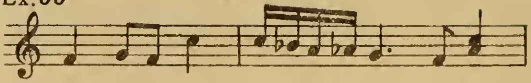
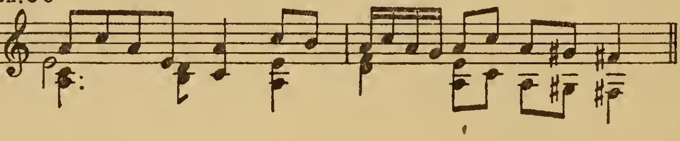
* Examples 52 to 56 are from various collections published or unpublished, and quoted elsewhere.[20]

Ex. 55



When a tune passes from one mode to another, the singing—obviously for reasons of expediency—nearly always reverts to unison. Here is an instance which also shows a remarkably bold modulation:

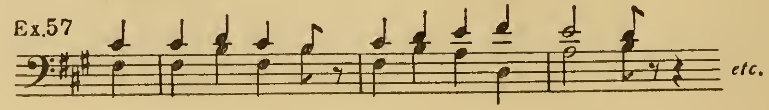
Ex. 56



Such are, roughly, the tonal, modal and harmonic idiosyncrasies of Russian folk-music. The above examples show that it differs far more from Western music than is generally supposed. But while it is altogether correct to say that the notes of its scales have none of the set harmonic associations of the Western major and minor scales (for instance, as was said a while ago, the seventh degree is not necessarily related to the dominant), it would be inaccurate to say that they are as far from implying a harmony as plainsong is. On the other hand, most Russian folk-tunes do not imply a bass any more than plainsong does.

Ever since modern Russian music became a subject of discussion, there has been plenty of glib talk on its indebtedness to folk-music: but only from the point of view of melody and so-called local colour; the far more important question of the effects of native usage on the composers' harmonic, modulatory, and structural schemes remaining entirely neglected. It is true that nineteenth-century Russian music shows few signs of any direct influence of the rude, archaic methods of the peasant singers. Kastalsky, writing in 1923, averred that the one and only instance in the whole literature of the period was a chorus in Borodin's *Prince Igor*. Since then the following example from the unfinished fifth act of *Khovanshchina*:

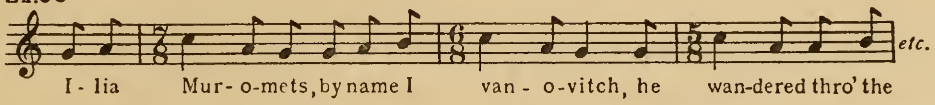
Ex. 57



has come to light. It also is an exception. But on the other hand, a good deal of Mussorgsky's stark, abrupt part-writing, many of his harmonies, cadences and modulations were very close to what is to be found in the native music of Russia.

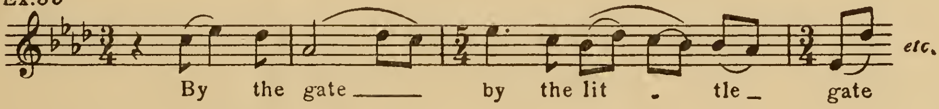
Another important feature of this music is the extreme variety of its metres and rhythms, many of them asymmetric. Combinations such as:

[14] Ex.58


I - lia Mur- o-mets, by name I van - o-vitch, he wan-dered thro' the
etc.

are frequent. In the above example, the singing is strictly syllabic: but as often as not metre and rhythm are determined not by the number of syllables, not by scansion or accents, but by purely musical considerations. Here, for instance:

[14] Ex.59



it is clear that the determining factor was the shaping and expansion of the melody. This, of course, is nearly always the case when several notes are sung to one syllable.

Other characteristic types are: 5/8 + 6/8; 7/4 + 3/2; 6/8 + 7/8. All such changes may be recurrent or not. As regards rhythmic structure, it is also worth noting that neither very long note-values nor a great variety of note-values are used in any one tune. And as an instance of the asymmetric periods which are the outcome of asymmetric metres and rhythms, it will suffice to mention one tune[14] consisting of one 7/4 bar followed by two 6/4 bars.

All the above remarks show that Russian folk-music is the true prototype of Mussorgsky's. Hardly anything of the kind is to be found in the music of any previous composer. By now, asymmetry, frequent changes of time-signature, and modal and harmonic idiosyncrasies similar to those which will presently be studied, have long become current coinage. Indeed, Stravinsky and other composers of to-day have often been accused of using such resources to excess and mechanically. No similar accusation could be levelled at Mussorgsky. Not believing in art for art's sake, he was not interested in innovation for the sake of mere novelty. Wherever he felt that simple or, indeed, hackneyed effects would serve his purpose, he resorted to them as freely as, on other occasions, he would resort to unprecedented methods (the Pastor's music in *Khovanshchina* is a case in point).

That his innovations—every one of them aiming, let it be repeated, at terseness and vividness in expression and characterization—should have been carried out along lines which many other composers found worth while following and extending (at times almost beyond recognition) is important from the historical point of view, but the point has no bearing upon the artistic value of his own achievements. There is no call whatever to stress his importance as a precursor when attempting to define and assess him as an artist; nor even to enquire which of his innovations were without precedent. A history of musical processes would take into account isolated instances of asymmetry in older music (quintuple time in Handel's, Reicha's, Chopin's, Boieldieu's and Glinka's, for instance); of modal features and unusual concatenations in Bach's and Berlioz's; of striking tonal plans in Beethoven's and Schubert's; and so on. But, when studying Mussorgsky's music, it is impossible not to come to the conclusion that it harks back to that of the Russian people without intermediate links, even though points of contact (a few of them very striking) with that of Liszt, Berlioz and Schumann, Glinka and others occasionally reveal themselves (see chapter XIX). On the other hand, considering that expounders of twentieth-century music mention "the invention of new basic rhythms" as an important feature, aver that "the slow movement of Tchaikovsky's Pathetic Symphony set everybody trying to think and beat in fives; refer to "texture founded on neo-modal or folk-song values"[23] or proclaim that the new music has discovered entirely new values under the influence of folk-music[24]—the question rises from the plane of history pure and simple to that of justice from both the historical and the artistic point of view.

Before examining Mussorgsky's style in detail, it is necessary to deal with the vexed question of his technical ability. The following lines from an article (not on him, but on Ralph Vaughan Williams) by A. H. Fox Strangways will make clear that this cannot be done adequately unless all the circumstances of the case are fully understood:

> The essence of the folk-song idiom is that the melody swings boldly from pivot to pivot, and does not employ the balances of 'civilized' music. But it is possible to write melody taking the pivots of the folk scale on a different plan or in a different order: in plain words, to take

the facts of mode and distribute them by keys, and so to combine the directness of the one with the strength of the other. This proposes a task whose discipline is of great value. It forces the composer to create a new technique. Hence the verdicts that he 'lacks technique', that his counterpoint is 'untidy', that his harmonies 'do not modulate'. But those who pronounce such verdicts do not fully understand the task he has set himself to accomplish.*

As already mentioned, verdicts on Mussorgsky's technical ability vary exceedingly, certain judges alleging that he was a mere bungler, incapable of properly carrying out even his finest conceptions (see also chapter XV, p. 225), and others that "it is incredible that people should go on describing him as an ignoramus and barbarian; his music is strong and refined; it always strikes the right note".[11] Indeed, the question is so delicate that even experienced and thoughtful critics are found to waver when tackling it.

"Probably the real truth is that he never had in him the makings of a sound technique."†

"That there were the makings of a fine craftsman in him is obvious from many of his works."‡

That he had acquired a bare minimum of technical proficiency in the usual acceptation of the term is beyond question. Although pure skill, which can be a bad master, is bound to be a good servant, he was not as misguided as might seem in refusing to strive to acquire more. The technique taught in his time certainly tended to foster formalism, and being narrow and cut-and-dried, was very difficult to outgrow. As shrewdly put by Gliebof,[10] the kind of technique that would have been useful to him was not in existence. It came into being much later, and he contributed greatly towards creating it. He certainly did talk a lot of nonsense about Western routine and false ideals: but this was simply because he felt Western technique pulling one way and his creative impulses another way. Russian composers of that time were bound to feel something of the kind, as Glinka had done—his references, in his Memoirs, to "the difficulty of getting out of the German rut" and to "strict German counterpoint being at loggerheads with free creative fancy" are significant in this respect. And it is impossible to see such overstatements in their true light unless one takes into

* *Music and Letters*, April 1920.

† Ernest Newman in *Musical Times*, February 1923.

‡ Idem, *Sunday Times*, 13 October 1929.

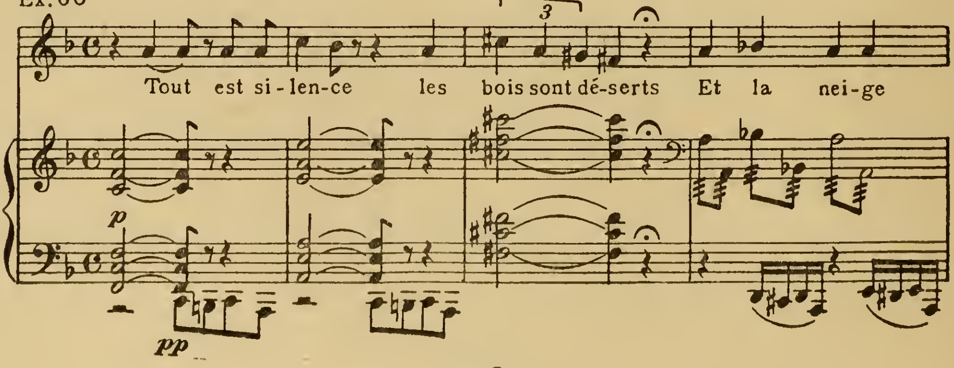
account the conditions and requirements of the country and period.

The long and short of the matter is that to allege that Mussorgsky never committed a technical mistake would be as absurd as it is to ascribe all his unconventionalities to lack of skill or of sensitiveness, and that it is even easier to exaggerate the ill effects of his technical shortcomings than it is to gloss them over.

Each case must be examined on its own merits. And, inevitably, verdicts will vary according not only to each judge's belief in the perennial validity of rules, but also to his individual sensitiveness and taste. Let us take a concrete case: that of those consecutive fifths that abound in Mussorgsky's music. If we admit, with Stanford[18] that "fifths are as ugly now as they ever have been, as they ever will be, world without end, because their ugliness most probably depends upon natural phenomena and not upon individual taste" there is nothing further to be said on the matter. Remembering the discrepancy of the explanations offered by theorists in order to account for this alleged ugliness, and how greatly the attitude of musicians to fifths has varied in the course of time, it is hardly possible to take the assertion seriously. Isolated examples of fifths, intentional or accidental, occur in the music of many a great classic; and treatises declare them admissible in certain cases. The modern evolution of music has shown that they may have a value of their own not only as timbres and colour effects, but also by virtue of their particular volume and density, so to speak, which can be used for effects unattainable by any other means.

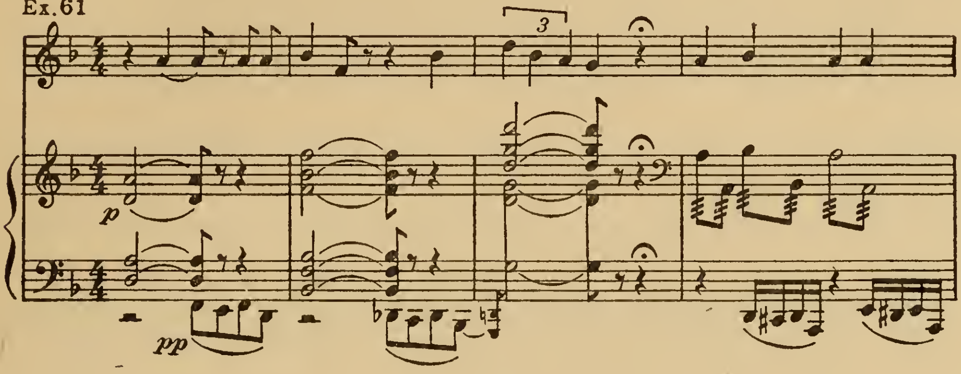
This nobody could doubt after having heard, for instance, the opening of Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*. Mussorgsky is the first to have availed himself of the particular properties of fifths extensively and for a wide variety of purposes. A very fine example is the opening of 'Trepak' (*Dances of Death*):

Ex. 60



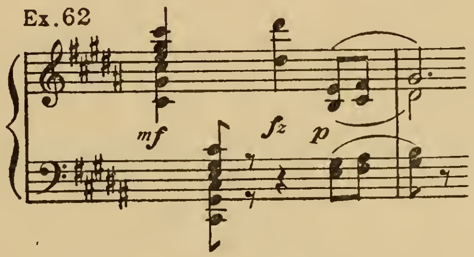
which suggests the dark, desolate, storm-swept plain; and is also, by the way, a striking instance of an opening out of the key, the song being in D minor. In the edition revised by Rimsky-Korsakof (the only one available until 1928) this was altered to:

Ex. 61



which sounds, in comparison, deplorably feeble. An earlier instance of a more or less similar process, used for descriptive purposes in a song whose words likewise evoke, as it happens, wind and night, is:

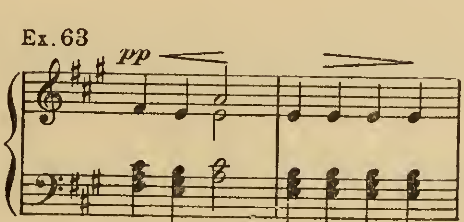
Ex. 62



('Wild winds blowing')

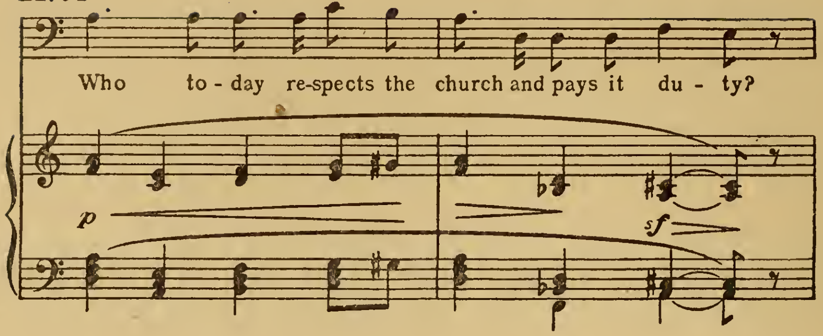
Fifths are freely used in church chants, archaic in character, that occur in *Boris Godunof* and *Khovanshchina*:

Ex. 63



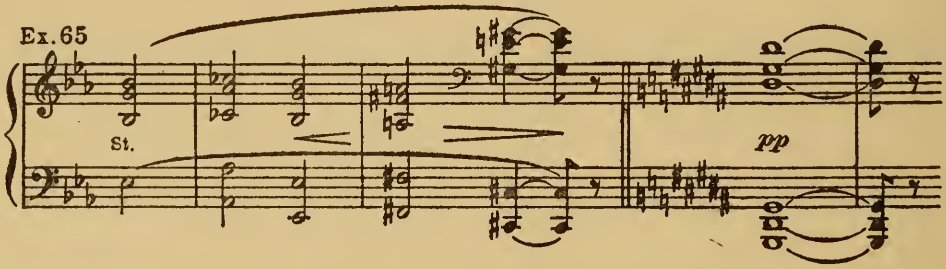
and in *Boris* in association with the sinister figure of the fantastic schemer Rangoni:

Ex. 64


Who to - day re-spects the church and pays it du - ty?
p
sf

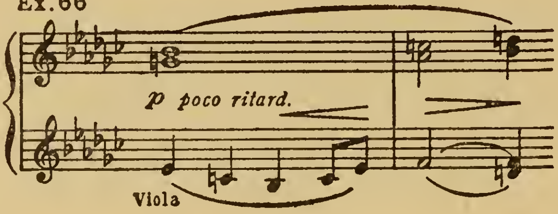
Ushering in the great monologue of Tsar Boris in its initial version, consecutive fifths again serve to express gloom:

Ex. 65



In the Chancellor's address to the people in the opening scene, there is an instance of fifths (between voice and clarinets *unisoni* and violas):

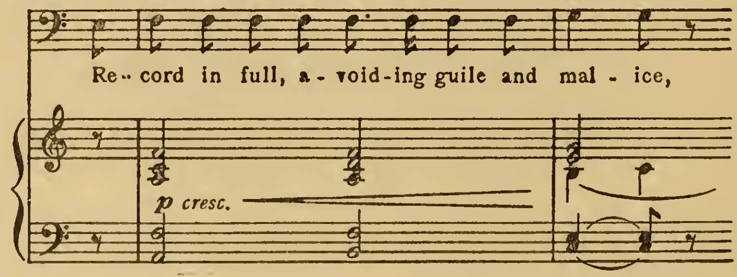
Ex. 66


p poco ritard.
Viola

which may be intentional or not, but whose sonority is wonderfully beautiful.

On the other hand, it is impossible to imagine a specific reason for the following instance of consecutive fifths and sevenths, in all likelihood unintentional:

Ex. 67

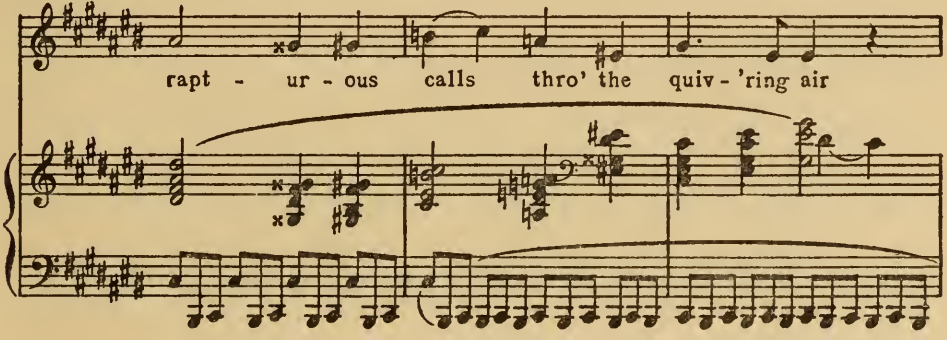

Re-- cord in full, a - void-ing guile and mal - ice,
p cresc.

(*Boris Godunof*, p. 77)

or to find any beauty in it. But, all told, Mussorgsky has given us countless examples of how to use fifths aptly, against a very few of how not to use them.

Nowadays, of course, the question of principle no longer arises; fifths have become part and parcel of the modern musical idiom. But, whereas they are a style-element in certain types of music, they stand out as a foreign body in the tissue of other types, exactly as, say, a bit of brushwork by Van Gogh would in a painting by Ingres. To judge such innovations sanely it is imperative to study them in their context, as they appear in Mussorgsky's music. And then it will be seen that they are not foreign bodies, impairing the general harmony of the tissue, but components of the basic structural scheme. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, it is impossible to alter them except for the worse—a point that was indicated in chapter XV. The same applies with equal force to Mussorgsky's use of consecutive discords, false relations, and so on. There is no need to go into particulars again. Here is one instance of consecutive seconds and sevenths used for expressive purposes:

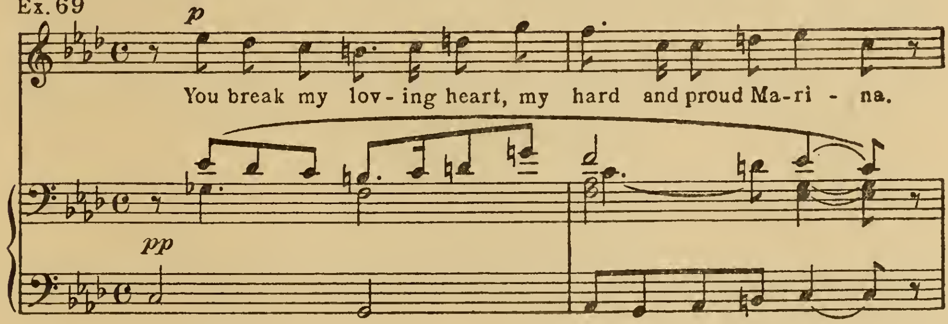
Ex. 68



(*Sunless*, No. 6, 'On the river')

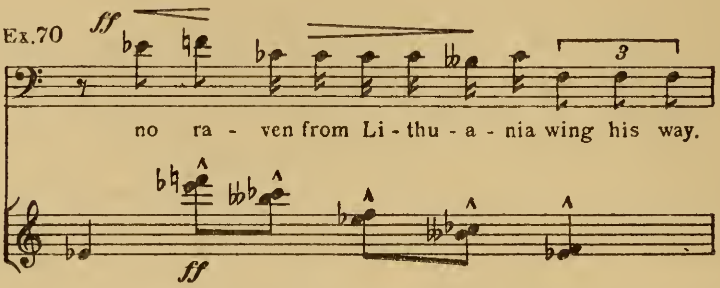
In the third act of *Boris Godunof* the following occurs:

Ex. 69



This was probably deliberate, and is very effective. The use of sharp discords for the sake of emphasis, in comedy (*The Marriage*, end of scene 2, consecutive minor seconds) or drama:

Ex.70

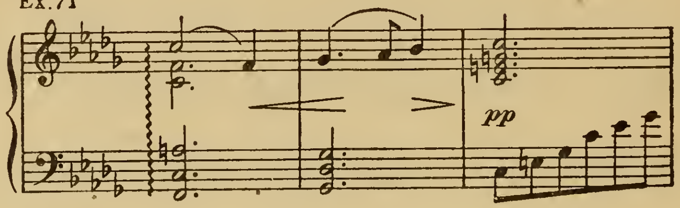


(coll 8va basso—strings and wind in seconds)

betokens boldness, but certainly not clumsiness or lack of sense of fitness.

It remains true that composers, bold or timid, may perpetrate consecutive fifths, sevenths, or ninths (but hardly seconds) unwittingly; and also false relations. How many of Mussorgsky's false relations were intentional, and how many of those that were not are objectionable is a difficult problem. This one (Mussorgsky's use of the concatenation in which it occurs will be examined in the next chapter):

Ex.71

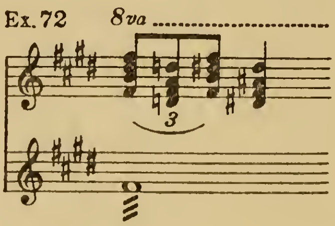


'Prayer' (1865)

is particularly felicitous. It also happens to be one of the kind that plays a characteristic part in the idiom of Gabriel Fauré.

Another, in all likelihood also deliberate, is:

Ex.72

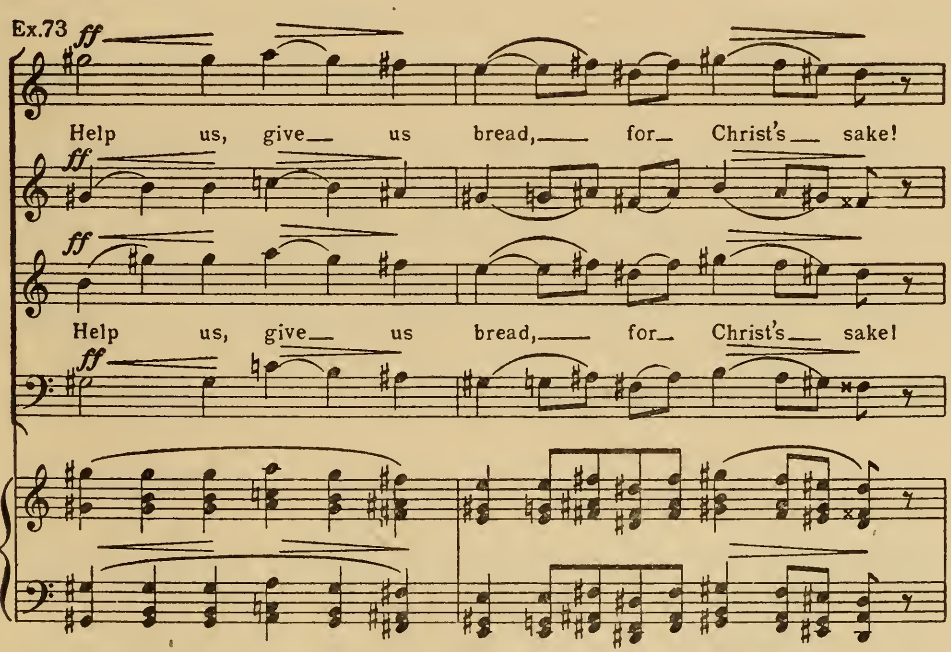


in the *Khovanshchina* prelude.

Rimsky-Korsakof, revising Mussorgsky's works, has dealt no less drastically with his false relations, real or imaginary, than with his consecutives and other alleged irregularities or faults. Yet even classical theory is more elastic on this point than on most others: "the rule", Parry remarks (in Grove's Dictionary), "is modified by so many exceptions that it is almost doubtful if the cases in which the effect is objectionable are not fewer than those in which it is not". In other words, the ear is the only competent tribunal.

Undoubtedly, Mussorgsky's aural feeling and imagination were keen and sensitive: but there is no denying that they were not always on the alert, especially during the initial stages of work or during work at high speed. A few examples of extreme crudity and carelessness occur in his rough drafts and even in clear drafts which, on the strength of their history, may be regarded neither as first states nor as final states: for instance, in the vocal score of the initial version of *Boris Godunof*—which, it will be remembered, came before the full score. The worst of these is the following, from the St. Basil scene:

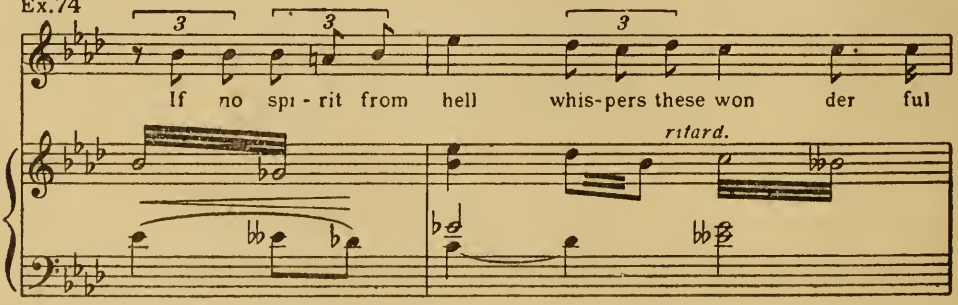
Ex.73

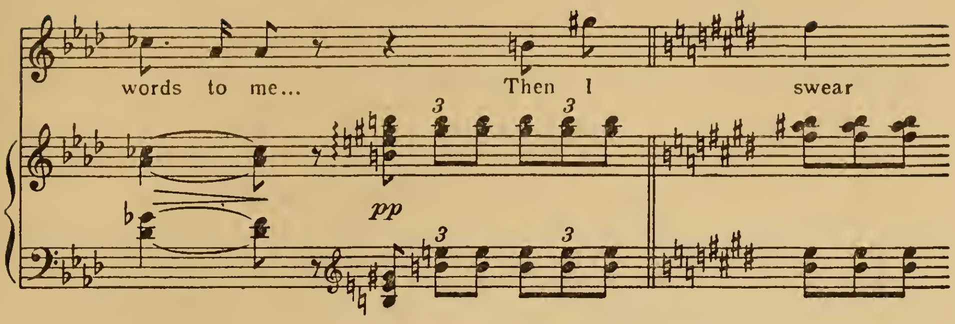

ff
Help us, give us bread, for Christ's sake!
ff
ff
Help us, give us bread, for Christ's sake!
ff

In the full score, the corresponding passage bears no relation to this first form, and is simple and telling (vocal score, pp. 320-1). On the other hand, there is in the initial version of the scene in the cell a stretch of almost equally rough and meaningless music which he felt no call to alter when orchestrating it (vocal score, pp. 60-1, footnotes Nos. 15-16; full score, appendix No. 2, pp. 161-3). It was only three years later, when composing the final version, that he re-wrote it. Whether all the alterations which he carried out himself, spontaneously or in deference to his advisers, were desirable and successful will always remain a moot point. It has been mentioned, for instance (in chapter IV), that Riesemann regards the tamer second version of 'King Saul' as an improvement. On the other hand, and apart from all questions of aesthetic judgment, all will agree that here and there in Mussorgsky's works, and especially in his scoring, a few discreet, purely technical emendations would be all to the good. These, had he been so minded, he would have been quite capable of carrying out himself in the light of experience gained from hearing them performed, as far more expert composers often find it advisable to do. If he did not do so with *Boris* it was chiefly for the reason that, as already stated, he had lost interest in it soon after completing the final version.

Whatever the cause may be, there is no reason to suppose that he would have decided to alter any of the irregularities that were the outcome of his ellipses, short cuts, and bold plunges *in medias res* simply because current theory prohibited them. His propensity to think in terms of the moment was an essential part of his realistic procedure, and it accounts for many of the liberties he took with the grammar of his time. When he felt the need for this or that chord, accent, key, touch of colour, or pattern, he brought it in then and there, without boggling over details. His mistrust of transitions, preparations, and such like, served him well most of the time, but led him now and then to take heedless short cuts. Minor but characteristic instances are:

Ex.74





(*Boris Godunof*, p. 261)

and ib., p. 287, ll. 1-2, the G flat major triad attacked over an unprepared pedal-point on A flat directly after the C major triad.

Other cases in point are consecutive octaves, fifths and discords which occur in his combinations of two melodic lines, especially when the one is a melodic pedal-point or *ostinato* (see next chapter, pp. 278–80). In this matter as in many others, he anticipated a modern practice which, as has been suggested,[11] may have been the origin of bitonal counterpoint. These consecutives at times make for hollowness and stiffness: but even then, as often as not, listeners can take them in their stride exactly as Mussorgsky did. Some of them do seem to have just happened rather than to be the outcome of the composer's deliberate quest for a particular effect. But many are thoroughly in keeping with the general tone and character of the music in which they occur.

All the above considerations should make it clear that there is no reason for us, when considering Mussorgsky's style, to be obsessed by the fear that many of the idiosyncrasies we are elevating to the dignity of style features may merely be the accidental outcome of imperfect knowledge or slipshod writing, any more than there would be to describe every one of them as a stroke of genius and an example for all to follow. So, no further reference to this question will be made in the present survey of these idiosyncrasies.

CHAPTER XVII

TECHNIQUE AND STYLE (II)

Relation of Mussorgsky's music to Russian folk-music—Modal, irregular, and variable scales—Metres and rhythms—Realism and music-shaping—Note-values and intervals—Syllabic and non-syllabic treatment—Scarcity of upbeats, feminine endings, and syncopation—Musical finger-prints—Interrelation of melody and harmony—Harmony: consecutives and discords—Appoggiaturas and pedal-points—Scarcity of suspensions—Polyphony—Cadences and modulations

THE foregoing remarks show that Russian folk-music is the true prototype of Mussorgsky's. A few points of contact between his style and methods and those of other composers will presently be mentioned, but with Russian folk-music, the points of contact are countless. He used very few actual folk-tunes; and when he did use them, it was frankly in their original capacity as songs. The one from Riabinin's repertory quoted on p. 240 is an excellent instance of his way of using them. The only two noteworthy exceptions are the glorification hymn in the coronation scene in *Boris* (a traditional tune, which Beethoven had used in his Op. 59, No. 2, and others employed after Mussorgsky—notably Rimsky-Korsakof in *The Tsar's Bride*) and the chorus 'Hey, keep rising' in the revolution scene (on the theme of an old dance song): both these are used as materials for working out—the latter with remarkable ingenuity and point.

Another chorus in the revolution scene, ''Tis no falcon proud', is a folk-song (No. 18 of Rimsky-Korsakof's *One Hundred Russian Folk-Songs*); so is the little song 'Lurching along' sung by Varlaam in his cups (inn scene), originally a nuptial song, 'The Bells of Novgorod' (ib. No. 71), and cleverly diverted from its original character for a caricatural purpose.

In *Khovanshchina* folk-tunes are even fewer. Apart from the one used as Marfa's love-song, there are only the three sung by Khovansky's serfs in Act iv. As for the instrumental works, none contains even part of a folk-tune, except 'Field Marshal Death' in which a Polish revolutionists' song is used for Death's apostrophe,[28] and possibly 'Kallistratushka' in which one tune may be, as averred by a few Russian critics, an echo of a folk-tune (Balakiref's collection, No. 30) also used by Rimsky-Korsakof for Tucha's song in *The Maid of Pskof.*

One might more reasonably regard this one instance as an illustration of the fact that patterns and turns current in Russian folk-music occur everywhere in his music—which is quite natural. All that could be said on this matter is aptly summed up by Gerald Abraham* as follows: "He wrote in the folk-song idiom as naturally as Burns wrote in the Lowland Scottish dialect. Except for a few unfortunate trifles, the equivalent of Burns's English poetry, everything he wrote is in an idiom of which the only musical root is folk-song."

In other words, Mussorgsky's melodies simply bear the same relation to Russian folk-tunes as Schubert's to German folk-tunes or Bellini's to Italian. There is no reason whatever to harp on the point, nor to indulge in laborious statistics and comparisons. After all, this is only one surface aspect of the question; and it is the deeper layers that require exploring.

First and foremost comes the matter of the modes. We have seen Mussorgsky using modal and variable scales now and then in his early songs, and freely in the music of his maturity. In the first version of 'Little Star' (1857) the vocal part is in F sharp aeolian, with variable notes in the accompaniment. Another significant example is 'The Peasant's Lullaby' in which he turns the modal features of the tune to account very much in the same spirit as he does in those of the Riabinin tune. The melody is in F aeolian—unquestionably so in the second version, and as definitely in the first, despite the occasionally intervening A natural and C flat. But the accompaniment, with the fifth B flat—F in the bass, suggests B flat dorian. In the final section, the tune is in F major, but on the same bass; and in the harmonies A flat and E flat alternate with A and E natural, adumbrating both B flat lydian and B flat mixolydian.

The treatment of Xenia's lament in the initial version of *Boris Godunof* is particularly instructive. The first two bars of the tune are in E flat aeolian, the following in F aeolian (an excellent instance of a modulation to the upper second, second degree playing the part of the dominant, as in certain folk-songs—see foregoing chapter, p. 237). The conclusion reverts to the starting-point. Mussorgsky's method of harmonizing the melody consists in simply adding a second part, suggesting the harmony strongly enough to ensure stability without emphasizing its centre of gravity:

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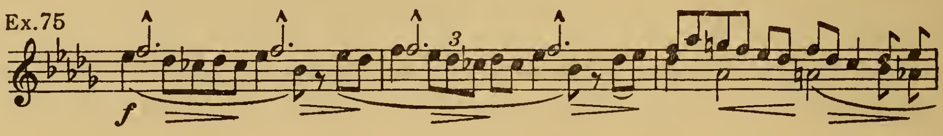
* In his *Studies in Russian Music.* The whole essay on the folk-song element in Russian music and on the difference between the natural use of such elements and the manufacturing of synthetic folk-tunes is most illuminating.

Ex.75

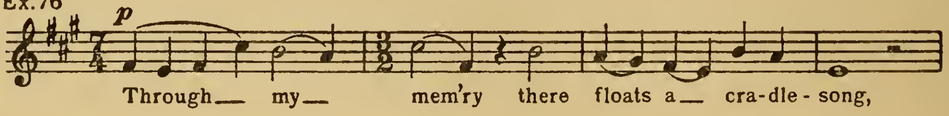


The final cadence is to the tonic triad of A flat major.

Each stanza of the 'Kazan' song (inn scene) is in two sections: the first in F sharp dorian, and the second—after a chromatic transition—in E flat (enharmonically D sharp) mixolydian, which might also be B flat (or A sharp) aeolian, for the harmony does not definitely settle the matter. And the final cadence of each stanza is to the A flat major tonic triad, which is enharmonically interpreted as G sharp, second degree of F sharp, to which it leads back.

Such cadences closely related to those that occur in folk-songs are, as much as the use of variable scales in the accompaniment, a favourite device of Mussorgsky's. In 'Kallistratushka', the opening section of melody is in F sharp aeolian, but with cadences to E, second degree:

Ex.76



Had not the instrumental introduction (on the F sharp aeolian scale, with B and D now natural, now sharp) firmly established F sharp as tonic, the tune would naturally be regarded as being in E mixolydian. The second cadence leads frankly to A major—via its dominant, the E triad. But at this point E sharp begins to creep in, conveying a flavour of F sharp minor. This key in turn is established for a while, and from its dominant, the C sharp major triad, passes on to B minor, but touches D major on the way. There are many other remarkable uses of variable scales and of temporary shifts in this song.

These combinations of modal and tonal elements, these passings from modal to tonal, or from one mode to another, are perhaps the most significant idiosyncrasy of Mussorgsky's style. Nowhere do they result in lack of firmness and co-ordination, in the vacillation or blurring which the above descriptions—in which theoretical ambiguities are deliberately underlined—might suggest. His tonal and modal schemes may be impossible to define safely in terms of usual theory; but there is nothing elusive, ambiguous, or shaky about them. In fact, the tonal basis feels so firm that the discovery of devices which should make for instability will often come as a surprise to analysts. This music embodies the *genre omnitonique* foretold by Liszt, but in a form depending upon the fundamental properties of Mussorgsky's ideas, melodic and harmonic, rather than upon the artifices by means of which his Western contemporaries were extending the boundaries of the major-minor system.

All the irregular metres and rhythmic schemes of Russian folk-tunes reappear in Mussorgsky's music, enabling him to keep, most of the time, remarkably close to those of human speech; and, in the instrumental works, to those of human gestures and motion generally. It has been alleged that practically all his metric and rhythmic innovations were simply more or less slavish imitations of the metres and rhythms of Russian verse. The allegation may seem plausible, considering the instances of strictly syllabic treatment that occur in his works, but there is no dearth of evidence to the contrary. For instance, the poem (by Nekrassof) of 'Yeremushka's Lullaby' is all in enneasyllabic and heptasyllabic lines in regular alternations: but the treatment is not syllabic, and the time-signature is 6/4 with occasional 3/4. Changes of metre and rhythm occur even in his early songs, not necessarily for prosodic or pantomimic reasons. For instance, in 'The wild winds blowing' 6/4 and 4/4 alternate for purely musical reasons, as made clear by the fact that in this song he often uses several notes to a syllable. The same is true of the changes in 'Kallistratushka'—notably 7/4,4/4,3/2 (see Ex. 76).

'The Banquet' is in 3/2 + 5/4 time. The treatment is syllabic throughout (the lines of the poem being hendecasyllabic) except that once two notes are given to one syllable, an extra 3/2 bar breaking the regularity of the alternation. And at one point a minim is used to stress an accent; all the rest is in crotchets.

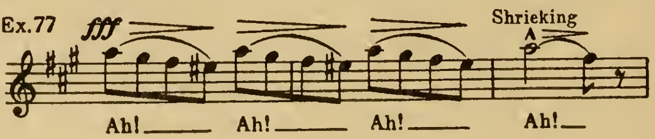
In 'The Ragamuffin', the lines are mostly pentasyllabic. But Mussorgsky introduces 6/4 and 3/2 bars between the 5/4 bars, in order to achieve changes of tone and pace. And a moment comes when the scheme suddenly broadens for a while, the melody proceeding in minims, with the time-signature 3/1, to mark a change of tone in the ragamuffin's taunts.

Another purely realistic, and very telling, effect is achieved in 'Savishna' by the use of quintuple time, the lines of the poem being pentasyllabic, and crotchet following crotchet in 5/4 without ever a change or a break, graphically representing the monotony and breathlessness of the simpleton's pathetic imploration to the girl he loves in vain. Here the musical rhythm is an exact—one might say an almost slavish—equivalent of the poetic rhythm. But the words being (like those of 'The Ragamuffin') by Mussorgsky, poem and music may be regarded as the outcome of one imaginative operation.

A comparison with the first song in *The Nursery*, 'With Nanny', is instructive. The words, again, are by Mussorgsky; and it is most unlikely that he thought them and the music out jointly. This little song, in which the time-signature changes twenty-five times in the course of fifty-five bars, according to the character of each sentence, had become famous long before anybody had started studying Mussorgsky's technique, its anomaly rather than its value for students of Mussorgsky's methods having attracted attention. The signatures used are 3/4, 4/4, 5/4, 6/4, and 7/4. A few of the changes might have been avoided by discreet recourse to pauses. Mussorgsky preferred to indicate the exact duration of each rest. He also gave much thought to minute differentiation of introduction and pace, and especially to the contrasts between the child's moods of excitement or dreaminess as he asks his nurse to tell him a story and starts remembering all the wonderful episodes he hopes to hear again. It is an example of very subtle realism.

The chorus of imploration in the first scene in *Boris Godunof*, in which 3/4 and 5/4 alternate irregularly, represents the people clamouring under compulsion, perfunctorily, without knowing what it is all about. The required effect is achieved by the character of the music, not by any realistic imitation of mechanical patter; for instance, by the woodenness of plaints such as:

Ex. 77



Apart from that, Mussorgsky has devised the melody of this chorus exactly as he would that of a purely lyrical song, paying due attention to shapeliness of line while skilfully calculating pace, accents, and punctuation.

In 'Trepak' (*Songs and Dances of Death*) the time frequently changes from 4/4 to 3/2 and back, always for reasons of pace. Rimsky-Korsakof did away with these changes, without any conceivable justification.

Fewer significant examples occur in the instrumental works, the *Pictures from an Exhibition* excepted. In this set, the alternation of 6/4 and 5/4 in 'Promenade' obviously has a realistic purpose. "Mussorgsky", Stassof says (no doubt on the strength of first-hand information), "has represented himself roving right and left now desultorily, now briskly, in order to get near the pictures that had caught his attention." And there is no mistaking the pantomimic purpose of the changes in 'Gnomes'.

It seems hardly necessary to add that Mussorgsky was perfectly capable of achieving suppleness and variety without resorting to any such devices. A case in point, among many, is the delightful little prelude to the second act of *Khovanshchina* (it bears, as it happens, a striking resemblance to 'Promenade'). Others are the song-set *Sunless*; and—to quote an example of realistically carried out dialogue—'Death's Lullaby'. Of the initial version of the second act of *Boris*, nearly half (from the words: "I knew not that you had heard", vocal score, p. 140) is in 4/4 except for one 2/4 bar (p. 154). In the earlier portion of the act, only three signatures —6/4, 4/4, and 3/4—are used, with ten changes in all. In *The Marriage*, too, the changes are remarkably few in number; and only 4/4, 3/4 and 2/4 are used.

Considering the exemplary suppleness and diversity of Mussorgsky's melody, and his readiness to resort to changes of time, it is interesting to note that he seldom uses long note-values in his vocal parts, and is usually content with a small number of note-values. Long values are more frequent in his early music than in that of his maturity. Yet Salammbô's prayer (Act ii—1864) may be selected as a typical example of economy, the values ranging from minim to semiquaver only. In 'The wild winds blowing' nine different values occur—from 𝅗𝅥‿♪ to 𝅘𝅥𝅯. The only other song of his in which as many are to be found is 'Sphinx'; eight occur in 'Serenade' and 'Field Marshal Death'. 'Savishna' and 'The Banquet' illustrate the other extreme. In 'With Nanny' practically all the work is done by crotchets; but there are a few dotted crotchets followed by quavers, two minims, and one dotted minim. Marfa's incantation in *Khovanshchina* consists almost entirely of crotchets and quavers. Only three values are used in 'Gathering Mushrooms' and 'Hopak'. In short, it may be said that in the great majority of cases Mussorgsky restricts himself to the range from dotted crotchet to semiquaver, with occasional triplets. In *The Marriage*, for instance, there are only three instances of longer values. In the whole part of Tsar Boris, in the initial version, we find only ten minims (six of which are in his dying speech), one dotted minim, and one minim tied to a quaver. In the final version, the great monologue contains eight minims, but nothing longer.

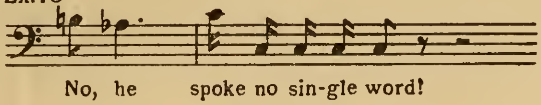
All this conforms both to the example set by Russian folk-music and to the minimum-of-stylization principle—the intention to keep close to the pace and character of speech. So it is natural that Mussorgsky should proceed thus in his realistic music, but more remarkable that he should be almost equally economical in moments of purely lyrical expansion: for instance, in Salammbô's prayer, and Boris's monologue in its second (*arioso*) form, Marfa's incantation, the love-duet in *Boris*, and *Sunless* (there are only four values in 'On the River').

The same economy is noticeable in many instrumental ideas: the 'Promenade' is all in crotchets and quavers. Most of the main themes in *Boris* (notably the Boris, Pimen and Shuisky themes) consist of not more than three values. So do those in *The Marriage*, and both the Khovansky themes. Their brevity, of course, makes the fact less striking, but, taken in conjunction with the rest, it is worth noting.

Mussorgsky's melody usually proceeds in modulations rather than by continuous motion in one direction. It consists, as a rule, of small or moderate intervals, with hardly ever a big leap. For instance, most of his themes occupy a small compass, generally a sixth at most. Although in his vocal music he often uses the extreme registers of the voice and passes freely from one to another (but always in order to secure a definite colour or degree of tension or relaxation), his phrases contain but few leaps of a seventh or more. And most of those that occur have an obvious specific purpose—the noting of a natural change of intonation under the stress of excitement (*Boris*, p. 199: "Nanny was most incensed"); of deep emotion (ib., p. 70: "Killed our lawful Tsar"; p. 132:

"My people die of hunger"); or of the effort to impress and persuade (ib., p. 217: "By the cross I now adjure you"; p. 266: "Call upon you by your oath"). Sometimes they are used for comic effects—realism tinged with caricature:

Ex. 78



(*The Marriage*, scene I)*

Examples of big leaps for melody-shaping purposes (a specification which need not imply that the melody referred to is inadequately expressive) are few. The octaves at the end of phrases in the second form of Tsar Boris's monologue (vocal score, pp. 187-8) and the Pretender's "see me on my bended knees" (ib., p. 294) may be adduced as instances of this type.

Here again, Mussorgsky's practice in lyrical music does not differ to any great extent from his practice in recitative, ordinary dialogue, or non-lyrical music generally. Still, whereas the distinction stressed by Rimsky-Korsakof[15] between his 'idealistic' and his 'realistic' style can serve no critical purpose, it is useful to discriminate between his lyrical and his non-lyrical style. There was in him a strong inborn strain of lyricism; and this is the chief reason for the fundamental dissimilarity between his art and Dargomyjsky's.

The difference is especially striking in the matter of recitative. Mussorgsky's is genuinely melodic, fluid and original. It moves freely and appears thoroughly natural and spontaneous. Dargomyjsky's, despite its admirably calculated adjustment to the words, consists of far more conventional patterns, with more or less conventional accents in the instrumental accompaniment, and also conventional cadences. When it becomes more melodic, it often seems to consist of snatches from a song or from an instrumental episode. Mussorgsky never dangles between song-style and recitative. His free declamation is always as melodic as compatible with his ideal of characterization—of 'truth before beauty'. When he feels that more lyrical melody is called for than could naturally arise in the vocal part, he entrusts it to the accompanying instruments. This is what invariably happens with the lovely motive of Boris's love for his daughter.

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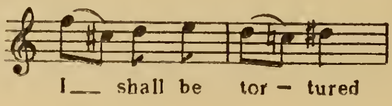
* Here Mussorgsky also gives for the sake of caricatural emphasis—the second syllable of the text (the Russian has 'Nitchevo') a false quantity, a device of which few other instances, if any, occur in his output).

Still, the distinction is helpful to students, whom it enables to see the moments when realistic methods creep in. The basic fact is that whereas in non-lyrical melodic passages it is often possible to understand why he has used or avoided this or that process, in purely lyrical passages—whose effect depends exclusively on that ever mysterious property of music, expressiveness—it is usually impossible to explain the part played by such elements as rise and fall, spacing, pace, and so on: one can only feel.

For instance, when he uses several notes to a syllable, his reasons for so doing are often obvious. It may be simply to achieve the graphic equivalent of an intonation, as with interjections (e.g., *Boris*, p. 140: "What?") and it may be—but very seldom—to achieve pathetic expression. Pantomimic suggestion may be aimed at. A character's voice may become tremulous with fear:

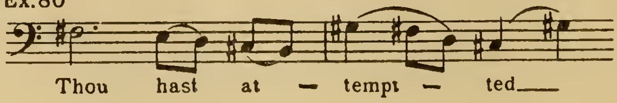
Ex.79



Or an irresistible tendency to wax lyrical may be a character-feature, justifying a liberal use of the device; as with Andreï Khovansky. Not so, however, with the nurse in *Boris*, although in her chatter with the children many patterns occur that might have come straight from folk-songs—a very apt method of characterization.

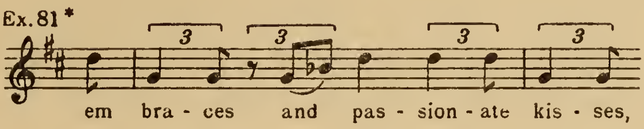
For melody-shaping purposes Mussorgsky uses it comparatively freely in song pure and simple, in choruses, and often to ensure accurate repetition of a pattern: e.g. in *Sunless*, No. 3, the Andante; in the lyrical outburst of Rangoni urging Marina to fascinate the Pretender (*Boris*, pp. 249, 260, etc.); and in Dosifei's objurgation to Suzanna (*Khovanshchina*, p. 208):

Ex.80



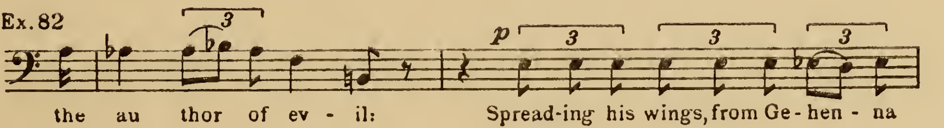
in which dramatic emphasis is achieved by fourfold repetition of the pattern—a process to which Mussorgsky very seldom resorts. When in his dramatic music he gives more than one note to a syllable for melody-shaping, not directly realistic, reasons, it is almost invariably in pregnant designs, playing an outstanding part. Among the few exceptions, this example of looseness from *Boris* (p. 290):

Ex. 81*



may be mentioned. When a theme or leitmotive first conceived as an instrumental pattern (like the Dimitri motive or the main theme in 'Trepak'), and containing grace-notes, is given to the voice, the grace-notes are preserved, even at the cost of giving more than one note to an insignificant syllable (such as the conjunction 'and'—*Boris Godunof*, p. 219). Otherwise, Mussorgsky hardly ever uses ornaments as additional notes to a syllable when his purpose is dramatic, rather than lyrical, expression. An exception, maybe the only one of its kind, occurs in Rangoni's admonitions to Marina:

Ex. 82


3
p
3
3
3
the au thor of ev - il: Spread-ing his wings, from Ge - hen - na

But even this is in a pattern previously given out in the orchestra. When at work on the last act of *Khovanshchina*, however, he started experimenting with the use of ornaments for dramatic expression (pp. 315-6 in the accompaniment, and 335 in the voice). The most typical examples of lyrical ornamental passages are in 'Little Star' (first version), 'Wild winds blowing', 'On the Dnieper', and 'Jewish Song'. In conjunction with this point, it may be noted that he seldom resorts to repetition of words, either for emphasis or for melody-building purposes. Most of the few exceptions occur in his early songs or in the burdens of songs in set form—except, of course, where the texts he used contained repeated words.

The distinctions just drawn between instrumentally conceived and vocally conceived designs are not always easy to substantiate. Even Wagner's Siegfried motive, although decidedly instrumental in character, may have been conceived vocally, since it first appears in the voice (*Die Walküre*, Act ii: "den heersten Helde der Welt"

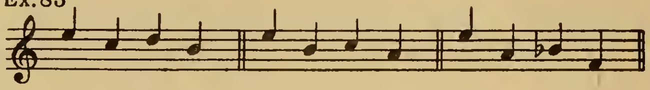
* The Russian text has the word 'and' at the same spot.

—the argument, of course, is far from clinching). Still it should be fairly clear that most of the main themes in Mussorgsky's dramatic music, even those that are not of the pantomimic order, were conceived in instrumental, and not vocal, terms: the themes relating to Tsar Boris, for instance, and also the Dimitri, Pimen, and Khovansky themes. Of these, only the Dimitri theme, and (but only in the initial version of the great monologue) the 'anger' theme of Boris (Ex. 27, *supra*), ever appear in full in the voice. In the instrumental works, the themes of 'Promenade', 'Gnomes', 'Aux Tuileries' and so on are obviously instrumental, but the two used in 'Bydlo' are song-tunes, as are the themes of the *Boris*, *Khovanshchina*, and *Sorotchintsi Fair* preludes. The reason for drawing the distinction is that the instrumentally conceived themes are utterly simple, restricted in compass, and consist of the plainest intervals, invariably diatonic except for a few themes of the picturesque order such as those of 'Gnomes' and 'Baba Yaga'—the only order of themes, too, in which changes of metre occur. Another noteworthy feature is that very few begin with an upbeat. In *The Marriage* and *Boris Godunof*, the exceptions are so few as to be negligible. In *Khovanshchina*, only two important themes start with an upbeat. The 'Promenade' in *Pictures from an Exhibition* begins with a two-note upbeat, although the writing does not show it. And upbeats occur now and then at the beginning of vocally conceived themes such as those of *The Sorotchintsi Fair* and 'Il Vecchio Castello'. But when Mussorgsky wishes to give an impetus to the beginning of a phrase, he prefers to do so by means of an appoggiatura on the down-beat. This disinclination to start with an upbeat is a marked idiosyncrasy, for the use of the device is common in the music of all times and countries. It shows how important it is, when studying his melody, to find out which elements in it are traceable to the influence of prosody and parlance. As mentioned a while ago, poetic metres, and also sometimes the structure of the stanzas (a factor which helped to determine the changes of pace in 'Trepak') have to be taken into account. Prosody determines, as it always should do, whether vocal phrases should start with an upbeat or not, and whether they should have a feminine or a masculine ending. Feminine endings are another device which Mussorgsky is not inclined to use. A predominance of masculine endings is noticeable in all kinds of music old and modern—this for many obvious reasons, one of the most important being the nature of the full close. But there are few composers, if any, who use feminine endings so seldom as Mussorgsky does. And even when, in vocal phrases, a feminine ending is unavoidable, he seldom emphasizes it by entrusting a suspension or an appoggiatura to the voice, but prefers to give the voice a 'real' harmonic note (and indeed, a repetition of one note rather than a rise or fall), and entrusts the suspension or appoggiatura to the instrumental accompaniment—as often as not, in the inner parts. (Exceptions are more numerous in the *Songs and Dances of Death* and *Sunless* than in any other work of his.) Only in one song, 'The Magpie', does he use extensively, for melody-shaping purposes, feminine endings not suggested by the verbal prosody; at bars 7, 11, 19, 25, 27, etc. the lines of the text having masculine endings. Another device to which he resorts very seldom is syncopation. Practically all exceptions occur in stretches of music in variation form: the 'Kazan' and 'Parrot' songs in *Boris*, Marfa's love-song, Kuzka's song, and the Persian Dances in *Khovanshchina*, among others. Syncopation is used very effectively in the maidens' chorus in Act iii of *Boris*; and also, to express perturbation, in the panic scene at the end of Act iii of *Khovanshchina*. This scarcity of syncopated rhythms is as peculiar a style-feature as the scarcity of feminine endings. No possible explanation of it occurs to the mind, except the perfectly simple one that he happened not to incline by nature to think in terms of such rhythms. The use of them is perfectly consistent with realistic aims and even with the minimum-of-stylization principle—which is not equally true of feminine endings, for these may easily become over-effusive and fulsome. (This might very well be one of the reasons why Mussorgsky is so chary of emphasizing them when he has to use them.)

As regards feminine endings, the question of parlance is important too. Endings such as those quoted in examples 102, 132, 133, and their feminine equivalents, which abound in his music (and also occur in Dargomyjsky's), are thoroughly characteristic of Russian speech. It is interesting to note that with Debussy they made their appearance in French music. They may be regarded—to borrow an expression invented by Ernest Newman—as one of Mussorgsky's finger-prints.

In connection with this question of finger-prints, it may be recalled that it has been averred[39] that "Mussorgsky had never associated two notes by force of habit". At an interval of over thirty years, the writer responsible for this sweeping assertion believes that it requires but a few trifling qualifications. There are a small number of recognizable finger-prints in Mussorgsky's music. Lapshin[16] was the first to call attention to certain of these, notably one which consists of two descending thirds, fourths, or fifths, in arrangements such as the following:

Ex. 83



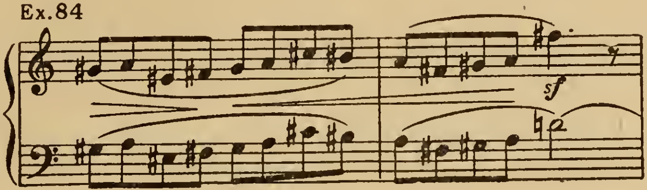
Patterns of this kind, common in the vernacular music, occur in hundreds in Mussorgsky's works, earnest or humorous, vocal or instrumental. The fourth followed by the third is freely used as phrase-ending in the great scene between Golitsyn, Khovansky, and Dosifei (*Khovanshchina*, Act ii) in all three vocal parts; two thirds appear in 'The Magpie', but also at one of the fiercest moments in the revolution music in *Boris* (pp. 389 ff.). So, to associate the pattern with any particular expressive purpose is out of the question.

It is usually dangerous, and it may often be puerile, to attempt to do anything of the kind. Noticing that the design consisting of a falling fourth and a return to the starting-point, which is common in music of all schools and ages, but happens to be rare in Mussorgsky's, occurs several times in conjunction with the ideas of God's power or wrath, death, life after death, supernatural phenomena or forces, Lapshin ventured to suggest, giving eight examples in support of the suggestion, that it had a special significance for him and that he never used it except with these particular associations. But he overlooked the fact that it also occurs in *Boris* at a spot where the words are "Oh, if you loved her truly, and knew how much she suffers!" (p. 285), and in *Khovanshchina*, pp. 21 ("All's in order . . . Carry on!"); 118 ("Shall I trust the woman's oath?"); 161 ("Is this how we serve Russia?"); 263 ("There is no joy in Russia nowadays!"); 283 ("We have served the Empress"); and 175 ("Please behave while you are in my house"). In short, it is impossible to draw any conclusion.

The same is true of more out-of-the-way patterns, or patterns containing less usual intervals. A few instances of augmented seconds in *Boris* will suffice to illustrate the points, this interval being used for expressive purposes (pp. 142, l. 2; 153, l. 2; 154, l. 4; 190, l. 1; 262, l. 4; 341, last line—in an altered form of the 'anger' motive, etc.) and also for melody-shaping purposes (pp. 241, l. 3; 272, l. 1, etc.), but sometimes because of the harmonic scheme (pp. 67, l. 2; 72, l. 3; 259, l. 3, etc.). Fuller statistics would confirm the fact that Mussorgsky had no set way of using any pattern, interval, or other device whatsoever.

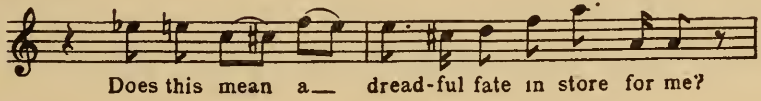
There are, however, a few instances of similar musical ideas occurring to him more than once:

Ex. 84



('Death's Lullaby'—April 1875)

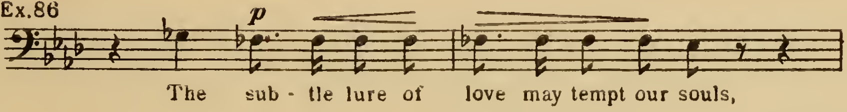
Ex. 85


Does this mean a— dread-ful fate in store for me?

(*Khovanshchina*, Act ii—August 1875)

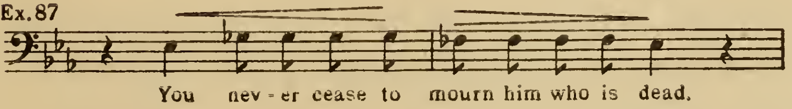
In both cases the pattern occurs in association with the idea of impending doom. Turns more or less similar to the Dimitri motive occur in various works—a fact that justifies, up to a point, the suspicion that even in *Boris*, some of the patterns that seem reminiscent of it were not meant to suggest the association. The resemblance between the opening of 'Wild winds blowing' (1864) and the theme of the chorus 'Ever rising, ever spreading' in the revolution scene in *Boris* (1872) is striking. It sometimes happened that the metre of Russian verse suggested to him the same pattern in dissimilar circumstances:

Ex. 86


p
The sub - tle lure of love may tempt our souls,

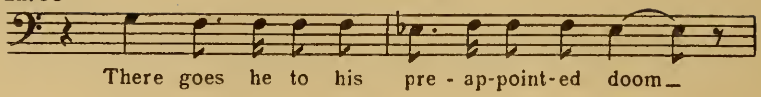
(*Boris Godunof*, p. 65)

Ex. 87


You nev - er cease to mourn him who is dead.

(ib., p. 126)

Ex. 88



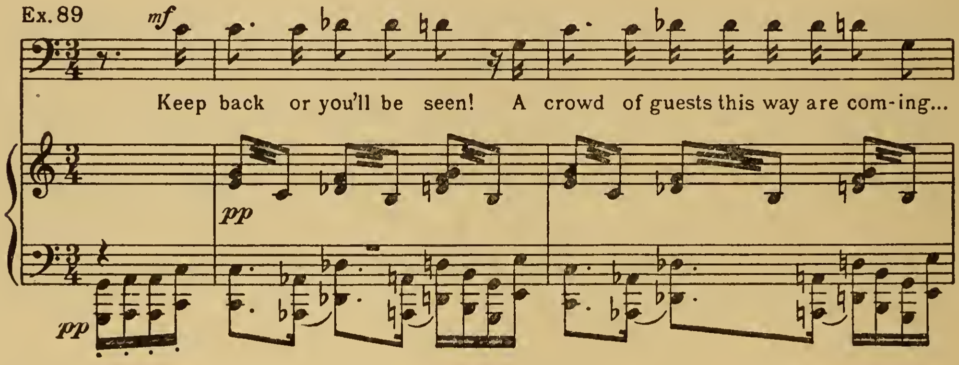
(*Khovanshchina*, p. 291)

Other cases in point are the identity of pattern in Grigory's exclamation "how fully you have lived them!" (*Boris*, p. 63) and Feodor's "The map of all Moscovia!" (ib., p. 128)—this is accountable in a measure, because both express an exciting thought; of harmonic pattern (a modal cadence) under Boris's words "was found in Uglitch lifeless" (p. 147) and "your wisdom would not fail me" (p. 315). But fewer instances occur in his music than in that of any other composer; and these would probably escape notice were it not that the patterns are distinctive, not trite ones.

Another interesting finger-print is the rise or fall of a semitone, used most effectively for changes of intonation or colour. It often occurs at an ending but also in the course of phrases, not uncommonly suggesting the influence of a variable scale.

It may be determined by a design in the accompaniment, as here, the orchestra giving out the theme of the polonaise:

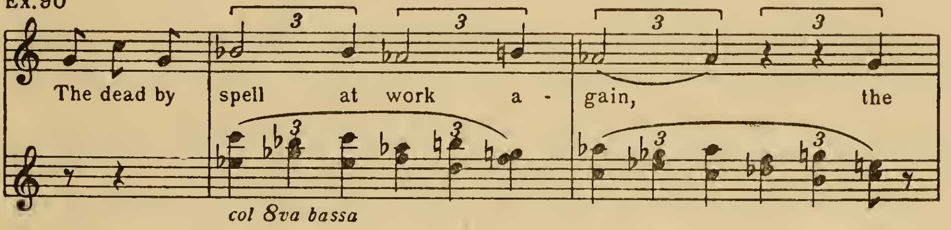
Ex. 89


mf
Keep back or you'll be seen! A crowd of guests this way are com-ing...
pp
pp

or by the harmony—often a concatenation of two chords at an interval of a third. No instance of this rise or fall occurs in an instrumentally conceived pattern.

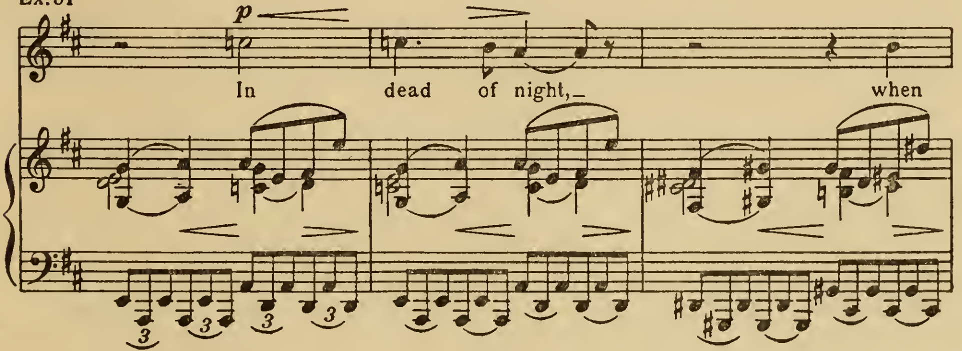
Again the question arises of the interrelation of melody and harmony. Whether the two were conceived together is an interesting point, especially when the harmony is novel and significant. We know that many of Mussorgsky's melodies suggest none of the customary harmonizations of major-minor music; we shall see that others lend themselves to a variety of harmonizations. And his treatment of the Riabinin song (Ex. 50, *supra*) shows that he was well capable of providing an independently conceived melody with an ingeniously devised harmonization that seems its natural and inevitable complement. So the question is not always easy to answer. The few available sketches provide little enlightenment. When a final version differs markedly from a preliminary version, the changes usually affect both harmony and melody (see text and footnotes in *Boris*, pp. 59-62, 320-1, etc.). So, in most cases, the melodic and the harmonic invention must have been interdependent, as is only natural. In a few special cases, it is reasonable to admit, without the help of collateral evidence, that when a melody (either declamation or song) obviously plays the essential part, it must have been thought out first, as in the *Marriage*—Mussorgsky feeling the while that at certain points special harmonic effects should come in. This should be true, too, of songs such as 'Savishna' and most of the *Nursery* set. But when the main significance lies in the harmony, no doubt the contrary occurred. Cases in point are the famous passage in the third song in *Sunless* whose harmonies made so strong an impression upon Debussy that he used them, almost textually, twice (in 'Nuages' and in *Pelléas et Mélisande*, Act ii. scene 3):

Ex. 90



and in 'Night'—the main melody being in the piano part:

Ex. 91



He resorts freely to complex harmonies, many of which were unusual in his time: to seconds, sevenths, ninths, elevenths and so on, with or without pedal-points or alterations. He often dispenses with the traditional preparations, and resolutions. As already shown, he derives many novel and forcible effects from plain triads—using them, at times, felicitously at points where many a composer would have introduced a discord. There are examples of discords in his rough drafts being, on second thought, replaced by triads: compare, for instance, the last line of the sketch in *Boris Godunof*, vocal score, p. 61, with the corresponding line of the text. Changes of this kind are very different in spirit from the changes in the second version of 'Saul' which appreciably altered the tone and character of the whole composition (see chapter IV, pp. 53–4), or from those in the chorus in the St. Basil scene in *Boris*. They are interesting simply because they show that he had no blind partiality for dissonance.

As soon as we begin to study his use of discords, the distinction between his lyrical and his non-lyrical style crops up again. Discords, in the classical major-minor system, were uniformly used to suggest tension and motion. Many of the simpler and more commonly used gradually lost their power to suggest either, and came to be treated more or less as consonances, preparation (and also, in a measure, resolution) being dispensed with. In other words: with the extension and loosening of the tonality bond, the feeling developed that they could be used for other purposes. It is generally admitted by now that they can be either biting and perturbing, or mellow and satisfying; and that whether they are the one or the other depends upon the way in which they are introduced, and especially upon the context. Dyson in *The New Music*—a book in which Mussorgsky is not even mentioned—rightly remarks that "the story of the century between Beethoven and ourselves may, from the point of view of texture, be fairly said to hinge on the exploitation of chords as such. The use of chords striking in themselves or strange in their context, and the unexpected inferences or ambiguities of tonality and texture that such use involved became normal features in the technique of expression."

There is no need to dwell upon Mussorgsky's use of biting discords to suggest tension or perturbation. A more important point is that he was one of the very first to use discords freely for lyrical and poetic effects, when not seeking to suggest tension; and even at points of repose, as they have come to be used in our time.

Twentieth-century composers having gone much farther than Mussorgsky in this respect, it has been argued that a valuable resource of musical art is lost when discords are treated as concords—for instance, in the all-dissonant schemes of Schönberg and Berg. The argument is fallacious. It ignores the fact, first made clear by Hugo Riemann, that in musical art, the notion and feeling of dissonance is, basically, not physical, but psychological; that triads, although nominally consonances, may acquire all the essential properties of dissonances by virtue of the part they play within a tonal scheme—a fact, after all, of which anybody who has done elementary harmony exercises in triads without suspensions or passing-notes should be fully aware. It stands to reason, then, that the same kind of thing can happen in an all-dissonant scheme, certain chords generating tension, and others relaxation and repose (for instance, in Berg's *Wozzeck*—vocal score, p. 30, bar 1, the first chord, which marks the end of a brief interlude). Naturally, the use of unresolved discords may become as mechanical as the use of duly resolved ones. Ending on a seventh or ninth is, by now, as much a stereotype as the dominant-tonic full close introduced by the second inversion of the tonic triad: but this has nothing to do with Mussorgsky's use of the device.* Discords introduced as mere adornments, or added spice, were no part of his scheme of things. So when he ended a song or a scene on a discord, he had a specific reason for so doing.

This, as often as not, was a more or less realistic intention: that, for instance, of suggesting suspense, non-fulfilment, mystery, an endless perspective gradually melting away in darkness. For a similar reason, Schumann ended his ballad (Op. 46, No. 3) on the dominant, as happens in Mussorgsky's 'The Orphan'. Later, endings on a discord came to be used without any such purpose (first act of Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*, Ravel's 'Jeux d'Eau' and 'Les Grands Vents', etc.) But with Mussorgsky, the impression conveyed is rather that of the beginning of an unobtrusive cadence, the resolution being not uttered, but understood. Thus, at the end of 'The Harper's Song', after the tonic harmony, E flat minor triad, has been affirmed, the A flat triad creeps in beneath it, suggesting an orthodox plagal cadence, subdominant to tonic, which remains unfinished. 'Forgotten' ends not on a discord, but on the first inversion of the tonic triad. This, in the foregoing stanzas, had been followed by the root positions: and so the mind instinctively completes the pattern.

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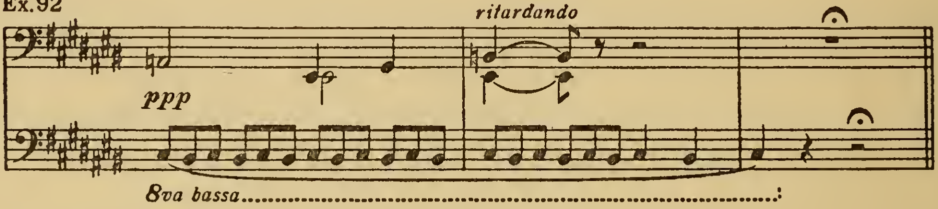
* One of the earliest examples of a song ending on a discord is the Shepherd's song in Gounod's *Sapho* (1851), which runs from end to end over a pedal-point in fifths, A-E-B, in imitation of a drone.

Similar, although slightly more explicit, is the end of the St. Basil scene in *Boris* (which in the final version becomes the end of the revolution scene, and of the whole work), a faintly outlined cadence consisting, to describe it roughly, of an F major triad followed by an unharmonized E suggesting the A minor triad. This, and also the end of the first scene in *Boris*—the tonic C sharp, unharmonized; the third, D sharp F sharp, and again the tonic—make the spirit of the device thoroughly clear. In the first act of *Khovanshchina*, the end on the repeated augmented fourth, F sharp C, standing for the strokes of a bell, simply shows Mussorgsky refraining from rounding off where to round off would serve no valuable purpose. The end of 'On the River' (*Sunless*, No. 6):

Ex.92

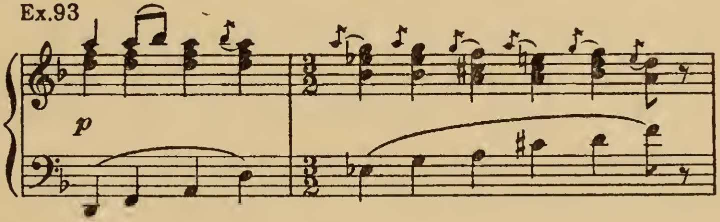


deserves special notice. The song had begun with the chord C sharp, E sharp, G sharp, B, which remains the harmonic centre throughout. So, when reasserted in the last bars, it conveys an impression of finality, and no other chord could do the same.

To consider the matter from a more general point of view, let it be remembered that the texture of Mussorgsky's music often being modal rather than tonal, there is no reason for him to affirm the tonic in the traditional way at the end of a piece any more than at the beginning. As already said, he succeeds nevertheless in achieving clarity and firmness as well as flexibility. Further remarks on the subject will be made in the next chapter.

A significant point is that he seldom resorts to neutral harmonies such as diminished sevenths and augmented fifths. Even so, a few instances of the hackneyed use of a diminished seventh as a transition or to mark a dramatic climax (for instance, at the moment when Ivan Khovansky is struck to death) occur in his music: but they are far fewer than in that of most of his contemporaries. The whole-tone scale plays no great part in his vocabulary and syntax, although he sometimes introduces short stretches of it—usually four or five notes at most, and not in conjunction with whole-tone harmonies. Of the chords derived from this scale, alone the augmented sixth (not really neutral, since it amounts to a dominant seventh with lowered fifth) occurs fairly often. At times, however, he uses whole-tone formations, including augmented fifths, for the sake of their hollowness, starkness and pungency, as elsewhere he uses plain fifths now and then, as colours:

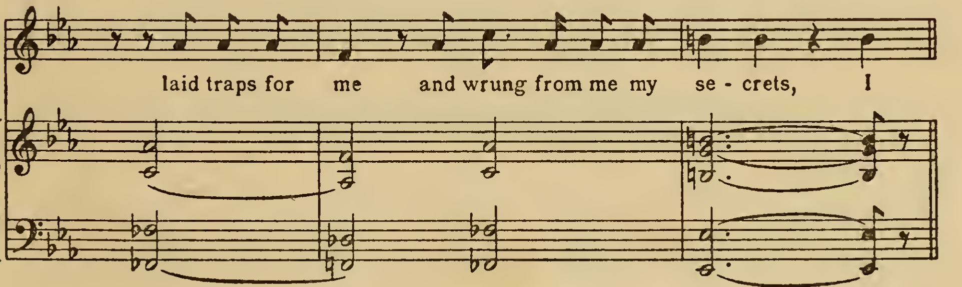
Ex.93



('Trepak')

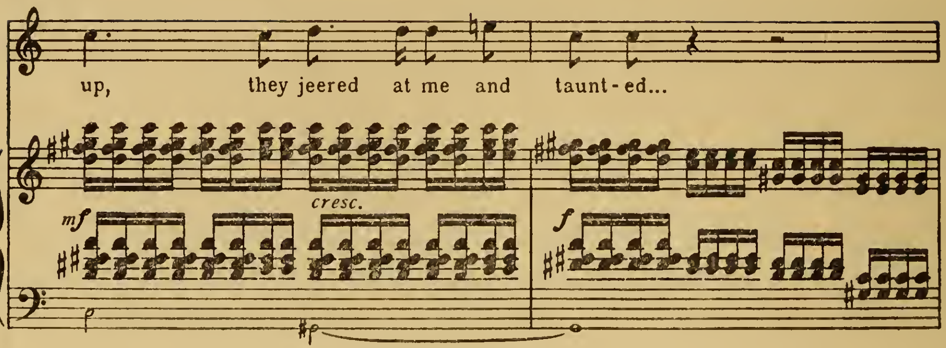
but more often as accents:

Ex.94



and never for effects of glitter such as were obtained by Wagner using them chromatically, and by later composers using them diatonically. He does not avail himself of the facilities they afford for harmonic pivotings. The following two-bar passage in *Boris* (vocal score, p. 61)

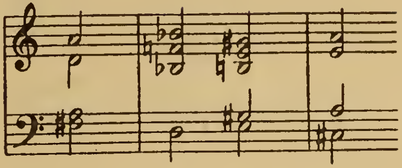
Ex. 95



is his nearest approach to Dargomyjsky's way of using them, in the final scene of *The Stone Guest*, to the exclusion of any other harmony. In short, with him, discords, however sharp and perturbing they may be, serve to establish tonal feeling and balance as understood by him. The study of his concatenations is particularly instructive in this respect. At first sight, it would appear that his procedure could be summed up in the one sentence: any chord can follow any other in any conceivable way (or, as will presently appear, any key). This sounds like anarchy pure and simple. But once again, he was not an anarchist revelling in egregious devices in order to be original and startling at all costs. Nor was he concerned, like Janáček, with "investigating the manifold mysteries of harmonic concatenations" with the deliberate purpose of finding a use for every one of them. The notion of elaboration was as alien and hateful to him as that of simplicity achieved by means of over-stylization, or the quest of beauty for beauty's sake. He was guided neither by rules nor by the desire to transgress rules. He went by his sense of fitness, helped by a discriminating ear; so much so that, as often as not, it is the reading eye and analysing mind, rather than the listening ear, that perceives the anomalies and clashes.

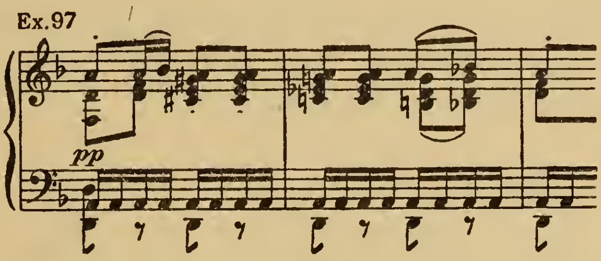
Instances of his unusual concatenations have already been mentioned. The one in Ex. 71 *supra* is worth considering awhile. It is, in theory, the boldest and most objectionable of all and a perfect illustration of the false relation of tritone, the *diabolus in musica* of olden times, with chromatic false relation and consecutive octaves to boot. It has a curious history. A distant precedent to its appearance in modern music may be found in a time-honoured pathetic cadence, to the survival of which these chords in Wagner's *Siegfried* (Act 1, beginning of scene 2):

Ex. 96



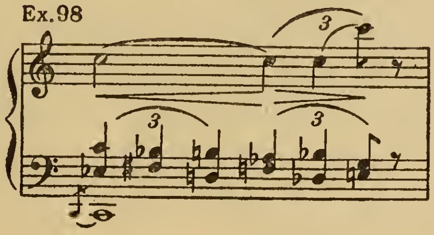
testify. It may also be regarded as an extension of the switching from a dominant seventh to another at an augmented fourth's interval, with which it has two notes in common, illustrated in Ex. 48 *supra*—a process commented upon by Dyson (op. cit.). But the earliest example of its use is to be found in all likelihood in a famous passage in Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*, in which it comes as a mere picturesque touch. Mussorgsky availed himself of it now and then (see *Boris*, p. 137, l. 3: F sharp and C triads; p. 287, ll. 1-2, C and G flat triads, the second over an unprepared pedal-point in A flat; *Khovanshchina*, p. 281, l. 3, A flat and D minor triads). Acclimatizations followed slowly. There is an instance often quoted in Debussy's *Pelléas*, Act iii. scene 1 ("je ne vois plus le ciel à travers tes cheveux"). And a time was to come when this same relationship was to become the structural basis of a symphonic movement (the 'Engel-Konzert' in Hindemith's *Mathis der Maler*). Mussorgsky, as a rule, prefers to use diatonic concatenations even when the melody is chromatic; but he has given us many examples of ingenious and telling chromatic harmonies. Noteworthy ones are, for instance:

Ex. 97



and

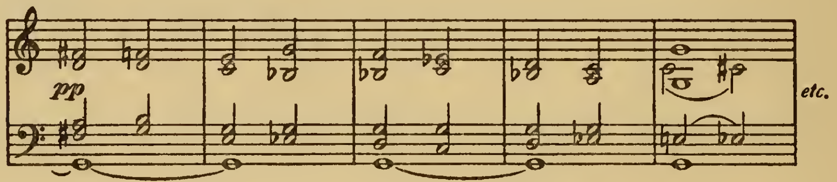
Ex. 98



the latter a contraction of the harmonics quoted in Ex. 107 which occur in the song earlier. There are one or two instances of chromaticism of a Wagnerian type in the initial version of the hallucination scene in *Boris* (pp. 152, l. 1, and 155, ll. 3-4) but these stand out as exceptions.

The following harmonies in *Khovanshchina* (p. 136):

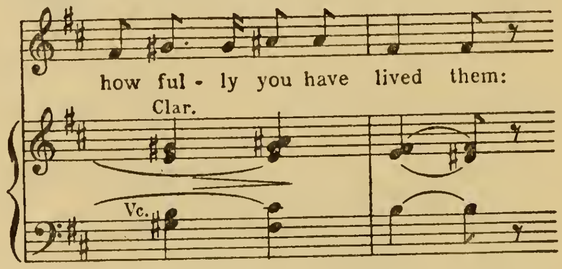
Ex. 99



are curious rather than impressive. Mussorgsky never scored the passage: so it should perhaps be regarded as a first state, as the indication of an effect intended rather than achieved. This is all the more to be regretted for the reason that it is the only instance in his dramatic scores of his relying on instrumental music at a crucial moment.

He resorts to passing-notes, appoggiaturas and pedal-points freely, but to suspensions sparsely, and to anticipations very seldom; especially so in the melodic line and in forms that are, as often as not, mere rhetorical stereotypes aiming at pathetic emphasis, and at endings, including even cadences and semi-cadential feminine endings. It is characteristic of his disdain for such facile effects that when suspensions occur, they should usually be in the instrumental accompaniment, and indeed in an inner part, and not in the voice or the instrumental melody:

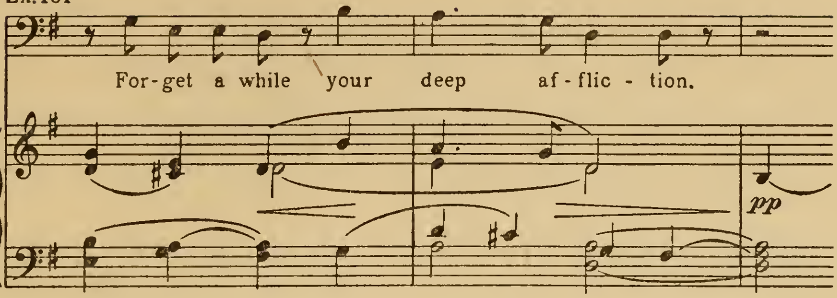
Ex. 100



(*Boris Godunof*, p. 63)

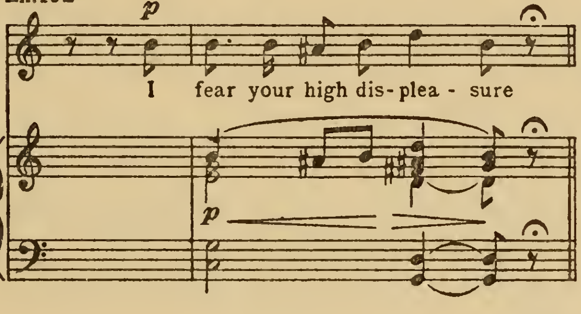
This is true of appoggiaturas:

Ex.101


For-get a while your deep af-flic-tion.
pp

(ib., p. 179)

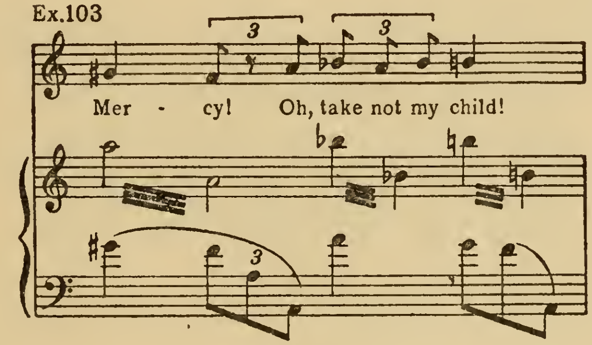
Ex.102


p
I fear your high dis-plea-sure
p

(ib., p. 218)

In the latter example, a subtle effect of intonation is achieved through the double appoggiatura: the passage is a great improvement on the corresponding one in the initial version (vocal score, p. 149) in which there is no appoggiatura. Conversely, it happens that doing away on second thought with an appoggiatura constitutes an improvement (*Boris*, p. 62, compare text with footnote). He sometimes uses an instrumental appoggiatura at the beginning of a phrase in order to secure an impetus such as might be secured by an upbeat if the prosody called for one:

Ex.103


3
3
Mer - cy! Oh, take not my child!
3

('Death's Lullaby')

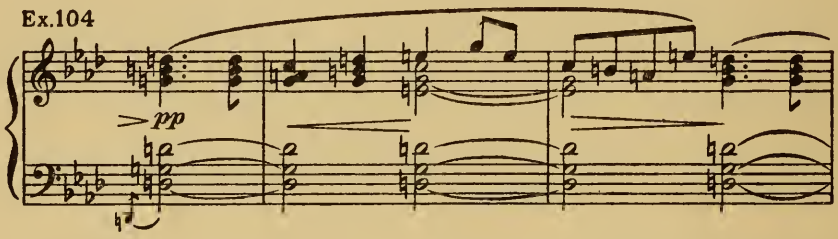
He uses it in final cadences (for instance *Sunless*, Nos. 1, 2, 5; 'Wild winds blowing', etc.) It is the only harmonic artifice (passing-notes excepted, of course) that occurs in his themes: in the 'love for Feodor' theme, the first and third notes lend themselves to treatment as appoggiaturas; the last note in Tsar Boris's 'anger' theme is an appoggiatura.

Examples of appoggiaturas in the vocal part occur, of course. They are particularly numerous in 'Sphinx', the *Dances of Death* and *Sunless*.

As already mentioned, many notes in his harmonies can be regarded as unresolved or irregularly resolved appoggiaturas, but the point is of no interest except to analysts concerned with explaining his irregularities away. It might, of course, serve to illustrate the part played by ellipses in Mussorgsky's style: but plenty of more significant illustrations are available.

Pedal-points have been a favourite device with the Russians from Glinka onwards. Mussorgsky uses them freely and felicitously, simple, multiple (at times unusual intervals, not excluding seconds), prepared and unprepared, in the bass, the upper or the inner parts. Here are a few examples:

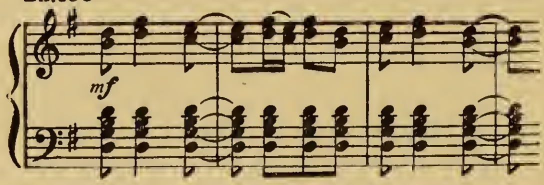
Ex.104



(*Boris Godunof*, p. 66)

Unprepared second inversion; as in the following:

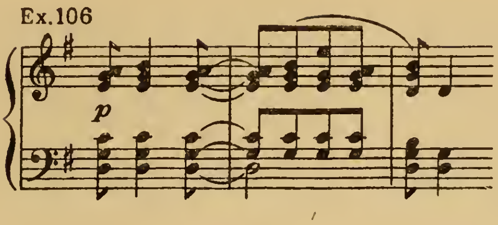
Ex.105



(ib., p. 231)

Here is a pedal-point in fourths:

Ex. 106



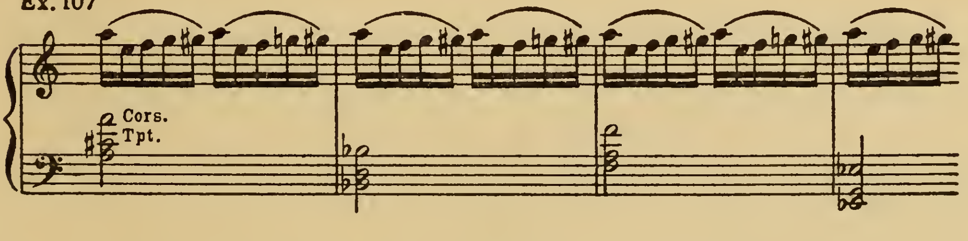
(ib., p. 237)

His harmonics not always being definable in terms of scholastic nomenclature, the question whether examples such as this last had better be described as "a melody moving against a sustained harmony" need not arise. The unprepared A pedal-point in Ex. 97 *supra* is typical. Many of Mussorgsky's sharpest clashes are the outcome of the impact of a melody or harmony upon a pedal-point.

The whole of 'On the River' (see Ex. 68 and 92) is over a pedal-point C sharp, plain at first, then figured, B sharp alternating with it in regular undulations. Elsewhere, very brief holding-notes, often in quick succession, are used to excellent purpose.

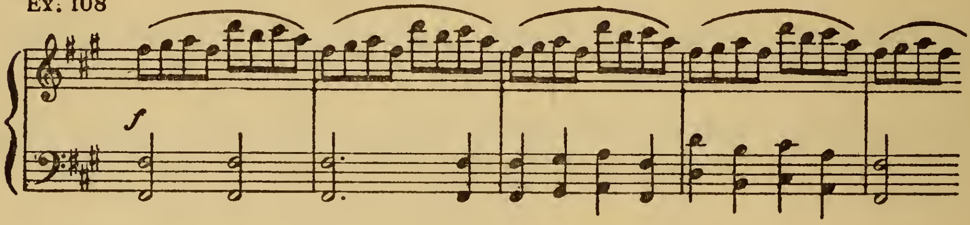
Another device of his sets a difficult problem of nomenclature. Modern composers often resort to melodic pedal-points: that is, more or less well-defined melodic patterns treated as holding-notes pure and simple, but different from the florid or figured pedal-point of classical usage in that they violate the school rule that "such pedal-points should suggest no harmony in themselves". The figured pedal-point in *Sunless*, No. 6, conforms to this rule. So does this one, at the opening of the revolution scene in *Boris*:

Ex. 107



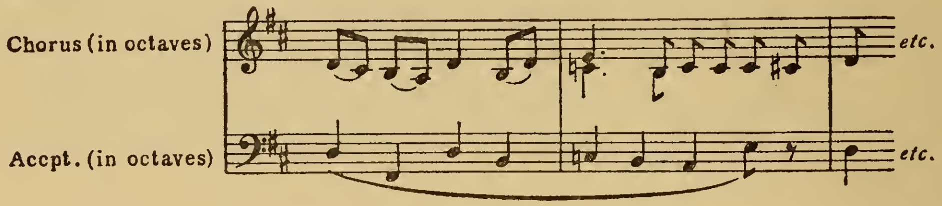
But the modern melodic pedal-point is unquestionably prefigured in passages such as, for instance, in the *Boris Godunof* prelude (p. 1, last line and p. 2, ll. 1-2), the figure in semiquavers over the main theme in the bass. Most examples that might be adduced are very short; and not only this shortness, but also the extreme simplicity of the texture (consisting, as a rule, of two parts only) may be sufficient reason for hesitating to consider them as genuine melodic pedal-points. Modern theorists, it is true (and notably René Lenormand and Charles Koechlin) accept the notion of very short melodic pedal-points, whose design, moreover, may vary within limits as they are repeated: still it is more in keeping with the usual terminology to regard such combinations as polyphonic in an elementary way and not properly harmonic. One of the most striking, and most unambiguously polyphonic, is the following in the revolution scene in *Boris*, a contraction of the motive of the 'Ever rising, ever spreading' chorus becoming an *ostinato* under which the theme is given out in augmented values:

Ex. 108



Another is:

Ex. 109

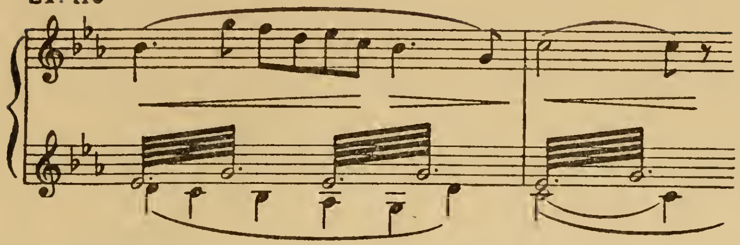


(*Khovanshchina*, p. 186)

in which the folk-song-like alternation of unison and two-part harmony, and also the directly attacked fourths, will be noticed.

Even in such combinations, Mussorgsky does not boggle at consecutives or clashes (e.g. the seventh and the ninth in Ex. 109), although, of course, these stand out far more than in less stark schemes. Those in the above examples may be regarded as valuable elements of characterization (Ex. 108, fierceness and turmoil: Ex. 109, austere archaism) and are in keeping with the style of the context. At the beginning of the garden scene in the third act of *Boris:*

Ex. 110



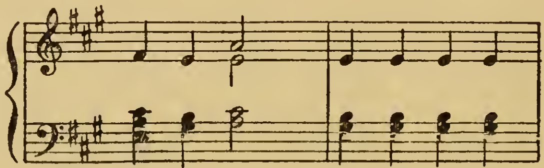
the three consecutive fifths may seem more questionable, and ascribable to sheer carelessness. Yet they are so noticeable, and could so easily have been avoided, that it is more reasonable to decide that he introduced them deliberately: perhaps for the sake of their cold, transparent colour (the garden is bathed in moonlight). The process, since then, has become current coinage: and these particular fifths are no less acceptable to the ear than those that Debussy and Ravel have used for similar purposes. Rimsky-Korsakof, in his revision, sought to amend the passage by syncopating the lower part—not one of his most regrettable corrections by far, but still one which spells ignorance of the fact that Mussorgsky, as already stated, had practically no use for syncopation and would never have dreamed of using it at that point. In the matter of part-writing, Mussorgsky is certainly not a paragon; nor was he, as averred by his censors, a bungling ignoramus. Considering, for instance, his basses, which have been criticized no less sharply than Berlioz's, we should begin by remembering how sensitive he was to the values of chords *per se*, and even, in a way quite his own, of their various positions. This is shown by his occasionally peculiar use of a first inversion, notably as a final chord ('The Derelict', *Sunless*, No. 2, etc.) and of a second inversion, even at points of rest (*Boris Godunof* p. 53, last line, "calm unbroken"; p. 75, l. 1, "O wonder"; p. 236, last line "to please Marina" etc.) In this last instance, we have two second inversions consecutively: the first (bar 2) scored for two clarinets and two bassoons, the clarinets under the bassoons, and the second for the same instruments plus strings, the bass given to the 'celli—obviously not an undesigned combination. In the revolution scene (p. 388) the song of the two vagrant monks ends on the second inversion of the F minor triad (without the third) and thereupon the 'Ever rising' chorus breaks out on an unharmonized F sharp, the unison following in the vocal score only, an F sharp minor triad—the bare fourth and the augmented fourth leap in bass and upper part contributing to the overwhelming effect of violence suddenly let loose.

So we see him electing to use this or that position of a chord, or series of chords in root position, without considering whether a more elegant bass design could be secured by means of a modification or two.

It is true that his basses are not always as flexible and mobile as might be expected, considering the speed at which the harmony usually changes (a point that will be dealt with presently). On the other hand, he has interesting basses in conjoint diatonic progressions (a famous descending scale in the bass in the 'Turkish Dance' in Glinka's *Ruslan* had set an example that all the Russians followed at some time or other); and also, here and there, melodic, freely moving basses, at times derived from his main themes—especially in *Boris*. He had little use for basses in chromatic steps. In 'Gathering Mushrooms' the bass moves chromatically part of the time, but less often in the second version than in the first (Lamm edition, pp. 12-13, and 16-17). The sketches for *Boris* also contain chromatic basses that were not preserved (e.g. vocal score, p. 60).

Most of those other basses of his which seem unsatisfactory to theorists happen to be the only suitable ones. What Schumann said of Berlioz's part-writing in his famous essay on the *Symphonie fantastique* is equally true of Mussorgsky's—and Liadof said it: the veriest tyro can easily detect the alleged faults and correct them, but the result, ninety-nine times out of a hundred, will be a loss. Rimsky-Korsakof's alteration of the bass in the choral phrase in *Boris* quoted *supra*, Ex. 63, for its consecutive fifths to:

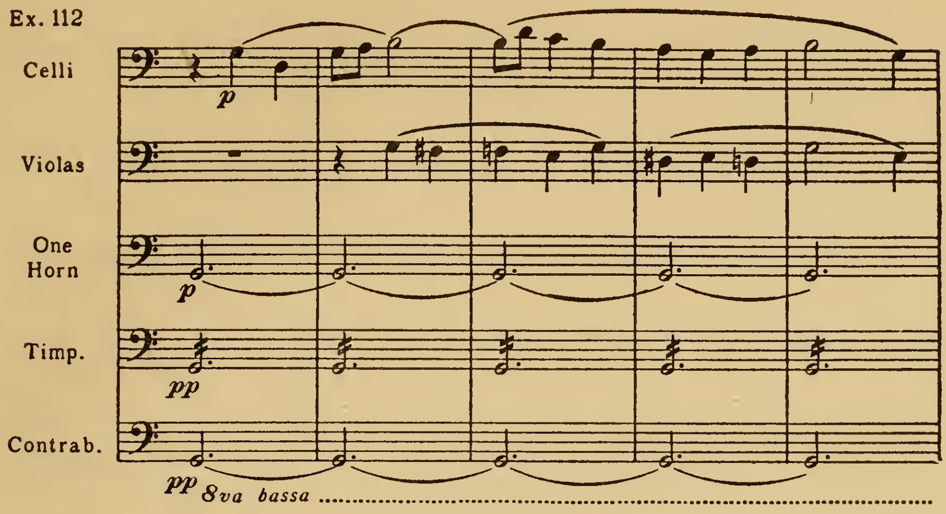
Ex. 111



will strike anyone who knows the genuine text as an intolerable enfeeblement, and also as out of keeping with the archaic style of the chant.

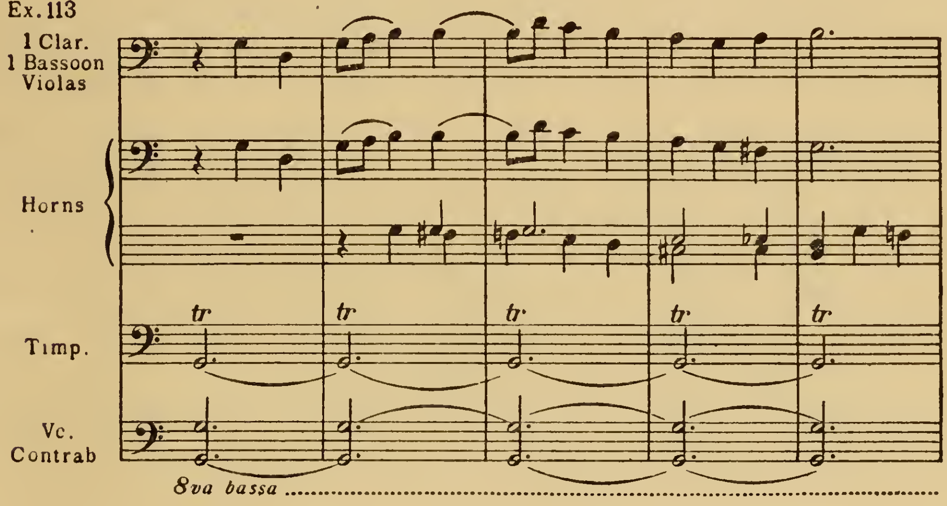
This is but one of the many instances in which Mussorgsky's choral writing, however crude it may seem on paper, proves far more effective than the theoretically improved versions. There are similar cases in instrumental passages too. For instance, anyone comparing this entry in the coronation scene:

Ex. 112


Celli
p
Violas
One Horn
p
Timp.
pp
Contrab.
pp
8va bassa

with Rimsky-Korsakof's version of it:

Ex. 113


1 Clar.
1 Bassoon
Violas
Horns
tr
Timp.
Vc.
Contrab
8va bassa

might quite reasonably decide that example 112 is the improved form.

The influence of the modal scales and the functioning of the variable scale is no less noticeable in Mussorgsky's cadences and modulations than in his other concatenations. The cadences to A minor in 'Death's Lullaby' and to the seventh degree of the modal scale in 'Kallistratushka' have already been mentioned; likewise the inconclusive final cadences on an inversion, a dominant, or a discord. He is probably the first composer in whose music half-closes and 'deceptive cadences' outnumber perfect cadences. His interrupted cadences are never of the painstakingly deceptive order that constitutes one of the stereotyped airs and graces of the academic style. Examining his modulations by means of a cadence to an unexpected key (which he generally leaves without establishing it) we can see forthwith that they are a different thing altogether: for instance, in *Boris*, p. 322, l. 2, the sudden change from A minor to B flat minor via the relative D flat major triad and the dominant seventh, the tonic triad appearing once only, on the weak part of a bar, after which the dominant triad (F major) leads straight back to A minor.

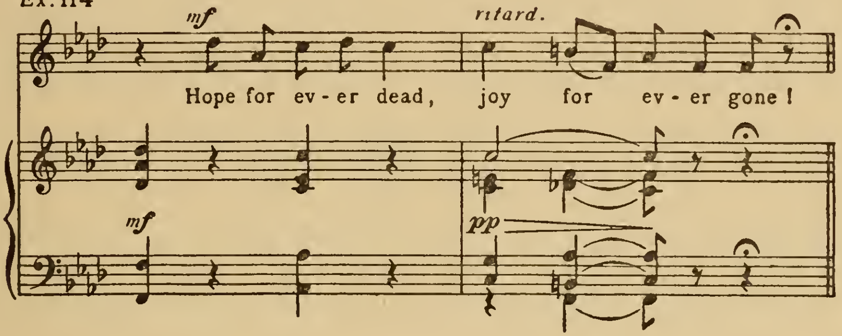
This is a good example of his way of using dominant-tonic cadences unobtrusively. Whether this frugal use of them was consciously calculated or not is difficult to say. The telling effects he obtains now and then by bringing them out frankly have already been mentioned.

He certainly reserves more or less emphatic cadences of this sort for special effects; for instance in *Boris*, p. 147, last bar, to p. 148, first bar, where the strong full close emphasizes the contrasting ominously gentle tone of the words that follow the Tsar's angry exclamation. The way the scenes in *Boris* and *Khovanshchina* end will suffice to show how consistent Mussorgsky is in his parsimony. In *Boris*, the coronation scene ends on an emphatic, prolonged full close, with plagal confirmation; and the death scene on an equally emphatic cadence, but plagal, the dominant harmony having played but a small part in the peroration. Nor is the dominant conspicuous in the last section of the garden scene (Act iii) which ends on a plagal cadence, definite but not emphasized. The first scene of this act ends on a faint dominant-tonic cadence, but all the other scenes without a cadence. Of the three finished acts of *Khovanshchina* one, the fourth, closes with a military march, which has a formal plagal conclusion. Its first scene, ending with the murder of Khovansky, has a dominant-tonic cadence. The third act too ends on one, but unobtrusively. The conclusion of the first act consists of a chorus, in A aeolian, unaccompanied except for the strokes of the church bell (represented by the harmony F sharp—C), which continue a while after the chorus has died out on a dominant-tonic cadence. Many of the main themes in *Boris* and *Khovanshchina* have no fixed cadential endings, various cadences being now and then given to them;

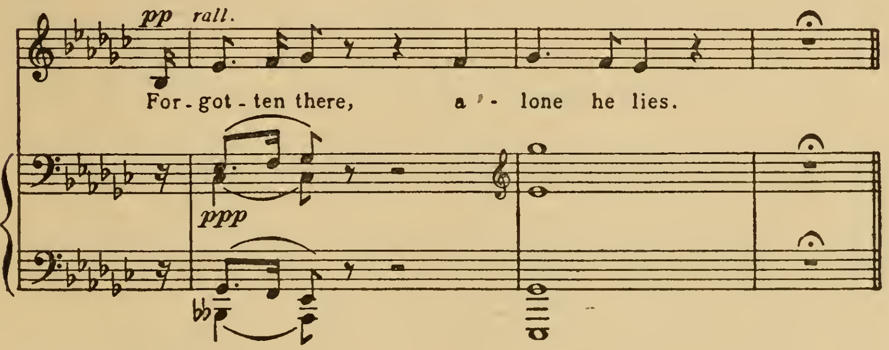
in which case, the last note of the ending usually is the first note of the following phrase (in *Boris*, the 'anger', 'majesty' 'love for Feodor' and 'love for Xenia' themes; in *Khovanshchina* the brief Shaklovity theme) others have inconclusive cadences which naturally lend themselves to the same treatment: the Pimen theme is a good instance. The 'Ivan Khovansky' theme ends on the second degree of the scale, usually interpreted as dominant of the dominant. The 'anguish' theme in *Boris* has a strong cadence, but to the dominant; the Dimitri theme, an unambiguously cadential melodic turn whose folk-song origin has already been noted; and the Shuisky theme—the only one of Mussorgsky's main themes in which a modulation occurs—a dominant-tonic cadence in the new key, so contrived as to melt away in the context.

Certain song-conclusions will be considered in the next chapter. Other points worth noting with regard to Mussorgsky's cadences generally are that they can end on any beat in the bar (endings on a weak beat are part of the scheme of 'The Feast', for instance); and that now and then the declamation or melody is prolonged beyond the point at which a cadential harmonic formula is completed:

Ex. 114



Ex. 115



The modulations are as varied as the concatenations. They are not to be considered in the same light as modulations in ordinary major-minor music, since the cumulative effects of keys and of modes and also of the irregular or variable scales occasionally brought into play, have to be taken into account.

It is not always easy to draw a line between passing-notes or auxiliary notes: seven bars on the A major triad in 'The Merry Hour', five, plus a pause, on the A flat triad in Salammbô's prayer, and so on, and harmonies extending over a bar or two are common. In the later works they become uncommon, and longer stretches hardly ever occur. There are a few conspicuous exceptions, notably at the beginning of the *Khovanshchina* prelude, six bars on the E major triad with added sixth; and in *Boris Godunof* introducing the chorus of the monks, pp. 360-1, eight bars on an ambiguous harmony, which will presently be referred to.

He always uses the shortest and simplest, but not necessarily the most obvious, processes. For instance, he often modulates without the help of the leading note, as at the beginning of the coronation chorus in *Boris* (from C major to G major and D major without preliminary F sharp and C sharp). The very fact that he is chary of prepared, circumstantial modulations makes those that he uses for definite purposes all the more effective, however simple they happen to be: thus, in the Chancellor's speech in *Boris*, the modulations from E flat minor (concerning which, see *infra*, p. 292) to E flat major, and thence to A flat major, the key of the pilgrims' chorus; and, in Act iv, pp. 372-3, the modulation to A flat via four bars on its dominant seventh.

A few typical examples of quick modulations in *Boris* may be mentioned: in the simpleton's song (p. 315) from A minor to the region of the keys with flats via the dominant of C minor—a telling change of colour; the Dimitri theme given out (p. 76) in E flat major reached via an unharmonized D after a G major triad that is preceded by the D major triad—a fine example of a brief incursion into a key for a special reason; p. 390, the tonic note F sharp, well established in its function, becomes the leading note to G major—a most effective use of a common device; and p. 360, there is a splendid transition from D flat major (Boris's prayer) to C sharp aeolian (the monk's chorus) by means of the obvious enharmony D flat—C sharp, the note being given a neutral harmonization (diminished seventh).

Despite this inclination to take short cuts or sudden leaps, and to disregard preparations and other precautions, he is, on the whole, sparing with modulations. He avails himself liberally of the facilities afforded by enharmony or by notes common to several keys, but does not allow himself to be led astray by these and to draw upon a new key without good reason. When he modulates suddenly, it is because he positively feels that a gradual transition would make for weakness. Here again we see him guided by an extraordinarily keen sense of fitness, which makes him accept or ignore traditional procedure according as the one course or the other leads straighter to his goal. Many relationships which a less free, less clear-sighted intuition would have rejected appeared to him not only admissible, but natural and necessary. Hence the wealth and simplicity of his vocabulary and syntax.

To sum up before observing his processes in action and considering matters of structure and continuity: very little indeed in all that has been observed so far could serve to justify the ceaseless rigmarole about his amateurishness and technical incapacity. On the contrary, all the features mentioned are of the kind that make for firmness, terseness, clarity and flexibility. The most extraordinary thing is how consistent, how perfectly subservient to his ends his methods are, how well he knew when to be thrifty and when prodigal. The infinite variety of his scales and harmonic concatenations enabled him to exploit a wide range of contrasts and shades of colour or expression while using but a minimum of harmonic artifices. Of these artifices, he preferred the simplest (passing-notes and pedal-points), making little use of the more ostentatious ones (suspensions and anticipations) which may easily lead to rhetorical over-emphasis. He used appoggiaturas freely, but more for reinforcing accents than for purely pathetic effects. His way of often having them in the instrumental accompaniment rather than in the voice, and of being chary of feminine endings, is thoroughly characteristic of his dislike of over-emphasis.

This is shown, again, by his strikingly economical use of contrasts in note-values—an unexpected feature in a composer who resorted so freely and aptly to changes of time-signature; by the small compass within which even his most forcible themes move, the scarcity of big leaps in his vocal phrases, and his restraint in the use of orchestral colours and of loud *tutti*. This policy betokens not ignorance or weakness, but wisdom and power. Weaklings, be they well-meaning bunglers or competent but uninspired craftsmen, do not, when their aims are ambitious, err on the side of economy: they rather incline to commandeer the whole range of available resources.

It is quite possible that, running through the list of all the devices (perfectly legitimate, and put to good use by practically every other great composer) which Mussorgsky neglected, people unacquainted with his music might think that he suffered, if not from technical incapacity, then at least from some kind of inhibition; or, maybe, that he was too easily satisfied with the very first form in which ideas occurred to him, and did not trouble to improve upon them by industrious experimenting. No such conclusion will survive in anybody who becomes familiar with his music, and judges it without prejudice. How he worked, how he proceeded in selecting and eliminating, we do not know. We have far too few of his jottings and rough drafts to be able to determine how much he experimented before finally deciding.

The question is of slight importance, it being quite clear that the decision, whether impulsive or calculated, was almost unfailingly sound. But, even so, certain style-features have to be registered without any attempt at explanation: especially so the scarcity of upbeats. He was, of course, no more unaware of the possibility of using upbeats than of the usefulness of syncopation, examples of which abounded in the music of the Russian gypsies all around him, and also in that of his beloved Schumann, among others. To allege that ignorance or clumsiness prevented his using these resources would be as absurd as to allege that the art of using long note-values was beyond him, or that his changes of time-signature reveal an incapacity to formalize and balance phrases according to customary practice.

Having registered all these idiosyncrasies, the analyst inevitably reaches the conclusion that his music lacks none of the needful vital constituents; and even though here and there a point or two of detail would admit of technical improvement, it consists entirely of vital constituents, with which it is impossible to tamper without causing damage. Indeed, his inborn capacity for dealing in essentials and for proceeding boldly and lucidly from point to point was such that, had he been endowed with a sense of instrumental music and inclined by nature to express himself in form-building, he might well have made giant strides towards a new type of musical art, rooted in his country's native music, evolved by building up on the modal principle instead of away from it as happened in Western music, and production of forms as ripe and complex and perfect in all respects as the Western symphony and sonata, but as different from these as, say, the Elizabethan drama is from the tragedy of Corneille and Racine—an Utopian notion so far, but one which might long have been a reality had the art of composition been practised in Russia for centuries by one composer of genius after another.

CHAPTER XVIII

TECHNIQUE AND STYLE (III)

Forms—Keys—Tonality and modality—Tonal plans and structure—Vocal and instrumental parts—Instrumental style

EXACTLY as Mussorgsky's syntax represents an adjustment between the tonal principle and the modal (including the particular treatment of modes exemplified in Russian folk-music), so do his most interesting forms.

The first point to consider is whether he evinced a preference for certain keys or modes, using them for specific purposes of characterization, atmosphere, or colour. Lapshin[16] replies in the affirmative as regards keys; but the statistics on which his conclusions rest do not cover the whole output, and he does not consider tonal and modal conditions jointly.

The question of the character of keys is disputable enough *per se*; and even exhaustive statistics may fail to show that a composer is guided by definite individual reasons in his selection. When modal character has to be considered as well, it becomes hopeless. The alteration of a single note, when it changes the mode and not the key, introduces a change of character very different from that which would result from a change of key: as when, in the C major scale, an F sharp brings about a modulation not to G major, but to C lydian. When contrasts depend upon both keys and modes, it is doubly illogical to consider matters in terms of the major-minor tonal systems.

In order, however, not to complicate the discussion, it will be convenient to deal here with keys chiefly, referring to modes only when special points suggest themselves.

Mussorgsky may have ascribed little importance to the character of keys, and also to the outer appearance of logic in tonal structure: but he had a keen sense of the value of key relationship. The time is not so far back when the opposite view was accepted as a matter of course: "The third act of *Khovanshchina* from the moment of the Scribe's entrance to the end, remained in E flat minor without any relief. This was both intolerable and unjustifiable, since this section consists of two distinct episodes. I left the first half in E flat minor, but transposed the second to D minor."[15]

Now that we have the genuine text of the work, we can see that the section referred to is not all in E flat minor, but contains a number of modulations (Lamm edition, pp. 245, 246, 247, 250, 258) which do provide a measure of relief. Whether the transposition of the second half of it to D minor was desirable remains a mere matter of opinion.

Mussorgsky's music teems with splendid effects of light and darkness, rise and fall, or tension and relaxation, produced by changes of key. It will be noticed, for instance, how telling the key of D flat major is, coming after F major, when Pimen starts describing the miracle that marked the passing of a virtuous Tsar (*Boris*, p. 69); or in the initial version of the scene in the Tsar's apartments by G major appearing when Boris tries to comfort his daughter (ib., p. 127). Further, there is the effect of both mysticism and tension produced by F sharp major after G major in Shuisky's description (vocal version) of the murdered Tsarevitch. In the initial version, the corresponding passage has no such contrast of keys. But we may feel sure that the contrast finally decided upon was not suggested from outside: in fact, Rimsky-Korsakof, in his revision, suppressed it, and rewrote the description in G major.

The many ways of his own Mussorgsky has of establishing or suggesting a key are characteristic of his attitude to tonality. The analysis, in chapter XVI *supra*, of his harmonization of the Riabinin tune has already made this point clear: a few other examples will show the diversity of his methods.

The 'Parrot' song in *Boris* (p. 198) begins in A major, but the tonic harmony is not affirmed until the fourth bar, the first three rather suggesting F sharp minor. The first actual modulation is to F lydian, without preparation; and after further quick modulations, a return to the main key is effected via not its dominant but that of F sharp minor. In the second stanza, the modulations are different; it ends with a perfect cadence in A major.

The first version of the song 'Night' begins in F sharp minor, the harmony of the second degree playing a bigger part than that of the dominant (cf. *supra*, p. 237, on the second degree as modal dominant in Russian folk-tunes). The next key is B, alternately major and minor; and after further modulations—some of them a trifle crude, others very fine—the music reverts to F sharp major. But Mussorgsky was reluctant to reassert the tonic, whose harmony in the course of the first eight bars appears only once (second beat of second bar). Its reassertions in the peroration are qualified again and again.

'Night', it is true, is—even in its slightly more compact second version—one of the most loosely constructed of Mussorgsky's songs, a fact which the sub-title 'a fantasy' acknowledges; but, as already said, it contains very lovely music.

The 'Hebrew Song' is all in G sharp minor, but with remarkable idiosyncrasies. In the four-bar introduction (harmonies of the tonic and the subdominant) the scale has two variable notes: E natural—E sharp, and C sharp—C double-sharp. Other chromatic alterations occur in the course of the song, the same harmonies predominating. B major, the relative, is touched; the dominant harmony (D sharp major triad) is heard only in the tenth, eleventh, and thirteenth bars, there being two 'deceptive' progressions and a third to the tonic on which the second verse begins. This is similar in structure. When the dominant reappears, it is again for a 'deceptive cadence' to the subdominant; the voice, unaccompanied, ends the period, and the last two bars repeat the music of the introduction, with the same variables. There can be no doubt that the song owes much of its character and beauty to this rare, subtle, and simple scheme. The Chancellor music in *Boris* is in E flat minor. In the bars preceding it, the tonic harmony (E flat minor triad) occurs unobtrusively in the course of an unharmonized run from the F sharp minor triad (tonic of the preceding passage) to the B flat minor triad (new dominant minor). But from this point on, the harmony remains indefinite, the subdominant playing a big part, the tonic not being conspicuously asserted, and appoggiaturas and passing-notes contributing to the feeling of suspense. On the twenty-first bar only, the tonic harmony (second inversion) is given out firmly. And after a while a dominant-tonic full close introduces E flat major; this tonic becomes the dominant of A flat major, in which the pilgrims' chorus breaks out.

In other words, Mussorgsky's sense of tonality does not depend upon the affirmation of tonic, dominant and subdominant, which he exploits or not according to the needs of the moment. He feels no need to begin or end with any such affirmation. It has already been mentioned that 'On the River' (*Sunless*, No. 6), is balanced upon a dissonant harmony. A miniature instance of the same procedure is ‘A Child’s Song’, in A major, all built up on the dominant seventh, the nearest approach to the tonic harmony being the notes A and C sharp occurring simultaneously on the second and fourth beats of the fourteenth bar.

The second number in *Sunless* fluctuates between suggestions of D major and of B flat major. This brief song, of course, was not intended to be isolated from the set of which it is part: so, it may be noted that the first had ended in D major, and the third begins in C major, afterwards proceeding into the region of the flats.

The admirable ‘Elegy’ (No. 5 of the set) is in no definite key, but there are strong suggestions of the dominant of F sharp in the first section, in which the B minor and F sharp minor triads occasionally occur. F sharp major is suggested in the midst of further fluctuations and finally F sharp minor emerges, to be quietly affirmed in two bars on the tonic triad, *morendo*, with an appoggiatura, B sharp—C sharp, which might be analysed as the adumbration of a cadence from second dominant (G sharp dominant seventh) to dominant (C sharp) and back to tonic. Needless to explain how unlikely it is that this curious, strangely logical plan was consciously devised: but the facts are there for all to see.

Even when Mussorgsky has begun and continued in an unambiguously established key, he does not make a point of reverting to it at the end. ‘Death’s Lullaby’, in F sharp minor, with its cadences, including the last, to A minor, has already been referred to. ‘The Ragamuffin’ is in C major. After a modulating section in which this key reappears several times, the end comes in G major, quickly but firmly established as a tonic—a noteworthy extension of the idea of ending on the dominant (as in ‘The Orphan’ and ‘Prayer’). ‘I own many palaces’ is in B major, but ends with a short section in B aeolian. The change is determined by the poetic sense; the poem (by Koltzof) says:

> I own many palaces and gardens, pearls and
> other treasures, and all that should make
> for happiness: yet well I know why I am
> seeking magic herbs, and why my heart is
> full of sadness.

Likewise in ‘Death’s Serenade’: the first half—the maiden dreaming and yearning—is in E minor; the second—Death wooing her—in E flat minor. A return to the opening key would have been thoroughly inappropriate in both cases; a comparison with the tonal plan of Balakiref's *Tamara*—the setting in one key, the drama in another—unavoidably suggests itself.

Turning to the operas for examples of bigger schemes, we notice how fine the tonal plan of *Boris Godunof* is, especially in its initial version. The whole tonal balance of the first scene rests upon C sharp and its enharmony D flat, the main landmarks being: C sharp aeolian (prelude), F aeolian (first chorus of imploration), F sharp aeolian (second chorus), E flat minor (the Chancellor's speech), A flat major (the pilgrims' chorus), and C sharp aeolian (final section). Not all the scenes show the same perfect symmetry, nor is there any reason they should. But the coronation scene, after the prelude evoking the tolling bells, begins and ends in C major. The scene in the cell begins in D minor; a second section introduces B minor, and the climax (the narrative of the murder) is in A minor. But, after the suggestion of a return to D minor (vocal score, p. 77, last line) the swift conclusion moves first to the relative of this key's dominant, F sharp aeolian, and thence to C sharp minor, in which the opening motive reappears, thus acquiring a new dramatic colour, to accompany Grigory's imprecation. In the initial version of the second act, after the scenes with the children, the central key is G sharp minor (the Tsar's monologue, crucial portions of his dialogue with Shuisky, pp. 146-8, and final section). The scene by St. Basil's cathedral begins in D aeolian, and A aeolian predominates from the Simpleton's entry to the end. The last act begins in an ambiguous E flat minor, and the music wavers for a time between this and A flat major. The end section is built upon the enharmony C sharp—D flat.

In the final version, the structure of the revolution scene calls for special notice. The opening is in A minor, the chorus ''Tis no falcon proud' in A flat major. A return to A, aeolian, is effected with the Simpleton's entry. The vagrant monks' song is the Riabinin tune, whose harmonization was described in chapter XVI (pp. 239–40). In its context, it may unhesitatingly be accepted as in F aeolian, whence a sudden leap is made to F sharp aeolian, in which the chorus 'Ever rising, ever spreading' begins and ends. Then a new key, E flat major, breaks in as the Jesuits intone their chant. The onslaught on them is in F minor, the Pretender's entry in E flat major—various modulations leading up to D flat major for his speech to the people, and another leading back, through E major, to A aeolian for the Simpleton's final plaint.

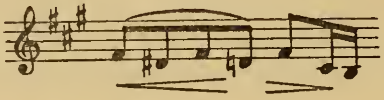
The great chorus itself is admirably laid out. The opening, as mentioned, is in F sharp aeolian, with which strains in B aeolian provide a contrast. The next key is G major—another of Mussorgsky's characteristic rises of a semitone. Then a short spell of bouncing from key to key leads up to a climax in F sharp aeolian, whence a new series of leaps, beginning in B flat minor, *pianissimo*, ends with another climax in the same key. Instances of interesting tonal planning are, of course, hardly to be sought in the ill-fated *Khovanshchina*; or in *The Marriage*, in which a bare minimum of structure, depending mainly upon the use of leit-motives, is made to suffice. The *Khovanshchina* prelude consists of random rambling from key to key; but the changes of key in the Persian Dances are effective. These dances, with *A Night on the Bare Mountain*, the most important of Mussorgsky's instrumental compositions, are a set of 'colour' or 'changing background' variations on two themes, and an excellent example—standing midway between Glinka's 'Lesghinka' in *Ruslan*, of which Mussorgsky obviously thought while composing them, and Borodin's *Polovtsian Dances* (1878)—of this genre dear to the Russians. Other instances, less elaborate, are (besides the prelude) Marfa's love-song and Kuzka's song, both in the third act. The tonal layout of the fourth act (practically all composed between May and December 1876, at a time when Mussorgsky was buoyant and working well) is compact and orderly enough to be worth considering, especially in the first scene, with its curious bunching up of keys—G sharp aeolian, F major, F sharp minor, with chromatic variants, G major, F major, F sharp minor, G major, apart from brief temporary modulations. The act ends in A flat major (the Imperial Guards' march).

To revert to the songs: again it can be seen how futile it is to contrast Mussorgsky's realistic style with his so-called idealistic, or, more properly, lyrical. There is no justification for contending that the most realistic songs are the most shapeless: not one of them, for instance—except naturally those that are recitative pure and simple, like 'With Nanny'—is as loosely built as 'Night'.

Comparing 'Savishna' and 'The Ragamuffin', both of them thoroughly realistic, we have marked that the intrinsic musical value of the song does not, any more than the form, depend upon its realism or non-realism: separated from the words, the music of 'Savishna' would be meaningless, but that of 'The Ragamuffin' would make a delightful instrumental scherzo. (A comparison between this song and the scherzo of Borodin's unfinished symphony has been suggested.)[39]

'The Ragamuffin' also shows that the texture of a thoroughly realistic song need not consist of substance hit upon more or less at random according to the requirements of the moment: every pattern in it emanates from the main motive exposed in the first six bars, except for the sudden contrast introduced by a break in the rhythmic flow—two bars in 12/4 (which, by the way, is really 3/1). Such sudden breaks in the rhythm are a noteworthy style-feature of Mussorgsky. Other typical instances occur in 'The Magpie', the coronation chorus in *Boris* (vocal score, p. 39) and Feodor's song ''Twas when Mother Goose went about' (ib., p. 172). These last two examples show that the process is not necessarily a concession to the claims of realism. In 'The Magpie', too, all the rest of the music comes out of a germ-cell of four notes with which the song opens. In 'Trepak', all is thematic, from the anticipation of the main theme under the opening chords (see *supra*, Ex. 60) to the echoes of it alternating with the new theme introduced in the final section. Likewise in 'Yeremushka', the plaintive germ-cell of which:

Ex. 116



reappears in the imploration chorus in the prologue of *Boris Godunof*, composed a few months later.

In other words the minimum-of-stylization principle, with Mussorgsky, does not preclude consistency of texture. Of course, not all the songs are so close-knit thematically, nor is there any reason why they should be: the process belongs rather to instrumental composition; and it is curious to find Mussorgsky, of all people, applying it to song.

The next point to consider with regard to texture is the relation and interaction of vocal part and instrumental. That the piano part of the songs, even when it is simple and does not aim at reaching further than the words, may be of real intrinsic value has been marked with reference to 'The Ragamuffin'. As with all great song-writers from Schubert onwards, the function of the piano part varies greatly. It may be an accompaniment pure and simple, in the traditional style of lyric song ('Savishna', 'Hopak', 'Forgotten', etc.), or one that aims more specifically at colouring the vocal part and stressing its accents ('Sphinx', most of *The Nursery*, *Sunless*, Nos. 1 and 2, etc.); it may be pantomimic, suggesting attitudes and motions ('Kallistratushka', 'Yeremushka', 'The Seminarist', etc.); it may evoke the setting with wonderful impressiveness ('Wild winds blowing', 'Trepak', etc.); or, reaching farther and deeper than words, even sung, ever could, reveal to the full the meaning latent in these, and in Tovey's words,* "the permanent features to be found in the background of the poem" ('Elegy' and 'On the River' in *Sunless*, 'Death's Lullaby', certain portions of 'Night', etc.).

In short, Mussorgsky carried song to a level never reached before in Russia, except by Balakiref in one or two of his masterpieces such as 'A Song to Georgia' and 'The Song of the Golden Fish' (Borodin's first songs were composed between 1868 and 1870), nor elsewhere except by Schubert and Schumann.

Considering his output, one cannot help wondering why, being a pianist of rare merit, and thoroughly acquainted, through his knowledge of the works of Schubert, Schumann, Liszt, and Balakiref, with the resources which the instrument provided, he should have given us but little piano music, and that little far less attractive and revealing than might have been expected. Even the best of the *Pictures from an Exhibition*, however racy they are, impress one as restricted in scope, and indeed sketchy for the most part. Most of them, avowedly, are miniatures, and thoroughly acceptable as such; and the 'Baba Yaga', on a bigger scale, is telling enough; but surely one would have expected more technical elasticity and ingenuity in the ambitious 'The Gate of the Bogatyrs'. And all the other compositions—Scherzi, Intermezzo, and minor pieces—show the same shortcomings even from the matter-of-fact point of view of instrumental treatment. But the more one studies the songs, the better one realizes the significance and high originality of the piano part. So he was not incapable of using the instrument skilfully and imaginatively; but it seems that, in order to rise to his highest, he absolutely required the stimulus provided by a poem. Once in his life only, he found an adequate stimulus in a mere programme, and composed *A Night on the*

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* Essay on Schubert in *The Heritage of Music*, vol. i

Bare Mountain. In its authentic, unrevised form (not yet available in print, but performed in many countries under the conductorship of Nikolai Malko) it is, as regards orchestral treatment, on a level with *Boris Godunof.* But, as just pointed out, nothing in his piano music comes anywhere near the high level of the piano part in his greatest songs.

In the matter of establishing the co-operation of voice and piano, his sense of fitness was a sure guide. It is thoroughly characteristic of him that in some of his songs he should have given an unusual measure of free play to the piano in introductions, conclusions, and even interludes, but elsewhere should have dispensed with even the most summary instrumental opening or ending. In the first version of 'The Orphan' and in 'The Seminarist', voice and piano enter together. In 'Forgotten', 'Epitaph', 'Trepak', 'The Banquet', and the first three numbers of *Sunless*, the instrumental preliminary consists of one note or chord only. A purely accompanying pattern preludes to the entry of the voice in a number of songs, 'Elegy' and 'On the River' among others. 'I have many palaces' starts with six instrumental bars in which the harmony of the dominant is persistently asserted; in 'The Ragamuffin' the piano gives out alone the first two bars of the main theme, the voice joining in on the third. In 'Death's Lullaby', a four-bar introduction gives out the main theme. So does the fourteen-bar introduction to 'Kallistratushka'. The 'Hebrew Song' and 'By the Don' begin with a motive that is not heard in the course of the song, but reappears after the voice has finished. 'The leaves rustled sadly', one of the slowest in pace of Mussorgsky's songs, has a six-bar introduction and a ten-bar peroration, both, like the remainder of the piano part, mere accompaniment music. But usually, when the piano speaks alone for any length of time, it is because it has something special to say.

Instrumental interludes are not common. Two occur in 'Wild winds blowing' (fourteen and thirteen bars respectively), which has a ten-bar peroration. And in 'Gathering Mushrooms' a four-bar interlude marks the transition from hatred, expressed in the middle, modulating section, to love.

The last notes may even be entrusted to the voice alone ('Forgotten', 'Misfortune', 'Joyless'). Endings on the tonic chord not in root position, or on the dominant harmony, or on a discord, are mentioned in the foregoing chapter. Interesting instances of significant perorations are: 'On the River', six bars, and 'Trepak', four bars, echoing the main theme; 'Kallistratushka', eight bars of play on two of the motifs; 'The Harper's Song', eight bars, introducing a new motif; 'King Saul', first version, eighteen bars (reduced to six in the second version).

The music whose main characteristics have been described, be it thematic or not in texture, realistic or not in character, and innovative or not in idiom, is equally live and telling. Mussorgsky certainly ranks among the greatest inventors of harmonies, rhythms, and melodic patterns that ever were. The fact that most of the paths he opened or was the first to explore were further explored to good purpose by modern composers of most schools will be considered in the next chapter. It need not be taken into account in the assessment of his music, which naturally is a question of achievements, not of indications or prophecies. Still, it may be regarded as confirmatory proof that his innovations were not still-born, nor the outcome of eccentricity or wrong-headedness. And if we agree with Parry (*Style in Musical Art*, p. 230) that "men do not look for new resources while existing resources are adequate", it also helps to make clear that existing resources were not adequate for Mussorgsky nor for those composers who, coming later, either learnt from him or rediscovered and extended for themselves the methods he had used. But the main point is whether he himself used his discoveries constructively and succeeded in creating a technique and style of his own.

The number of feeble works in his output is very small indeed, and these are not unsuccessful attempts at finding himself either in the province of expressive realism or in that of far-reaching lyricism, but incursions into the realm of threadbare conventionalities (see the quotation from Gerald Abraham, *supra*, p. 255). In all the rest of his music we see him guided by a practically unerring sense of fitness and proportion, displayed in both the selection and marshalling of his materials. He shows not only keen sensitiveness to the indefinable implications of sounds and rhythms in action, but a splendid sense of pace. This is exemplified not only in the many songs in which, be they short or long, simple or complex in contents, every point is made fully and satisfyingly, without ever a trace of over-insistence or hurry, but also in the initial version of his dramatic masterpiece, *Boris Godunof*. And if in this particular respect, the final version does not rise throughout to the same wonderful level, it is because of the conditions under which Mussorgsky composed it, with the preoccupation of having to meet the views of the directors and patrons of the Petersburg Opera.

Nothing could illustrate this gift of his more convincingly than the scene in the cell in its original form, which, although all narrative and dialogue without stage action, holds spectators spellbound from beginning to end—as happened during the writing of this book, at every one of the performances at the Sadler's Wells Theatre; it is only when the scene is mutilated, deprived of its beautifully balanced contrasts, and of its very climax, the narrative of the murder, that it drags.

His instrumental style, which is the last point to be considered, contributes greatly to the general effect. Indeed, the scene in the cell, and especially Pimen's narrative in it, is held up by Gliebof (whose essay on Mussorgsky's orchestration[26] is remarkably instructive and thorough) as an example of his orchestra at its most expressive, characteristic, and supple. His methods are extremely simple, but far subtler than would appear at first blush or even at a first hearing. He exploits the characteristic timbre of each instrument skilfully, but is seldom concerned with drawing upon the technical properties that lend themselves to effects of virtuosity—this remains true even of the hallucination scene in the final version of *Boris Godunof*, and also of *A Night on the Bare Mountain*.

The string parts very seldom contain any stipulation as to the strokes and bowing—the "*sul ponticello*" just before the hallucination scene in the final version of *Boris* is one of the few exceptions. But he marks the phrasing very carefully, and also the dynamic nuances. A noteworthy point is that he obtains many telling effects by associations of contrasting nuances: for instance, in *Boris*, St. Basil scene, full score, p. 41, bars 4, 5, one oboe *mf*, two clarinets *p*, one horn *pp*; p. 23, bar 2, oboes and bassoons, *ff*, trumpets *mf*, 'cello *f*; Act iii, p. 49, bar 5, two flutes and two bassoons *mf*, two clarinets *p*, two horns *mf*, and the other two *p*. The earliest instances of the use of this process occur in Beethoven's music (a very few) and in Berlioz's (a fair number).

Gliebof's conclusions on the subject are:

All told, he succeeded splendidly in obtaining the tone-character he desired. His technical errors are no more numerous than those which many composers with far greater experience commit; and a good many of these are due to the novelty of his conceptions and the difficulty of carrying them out at that time.

It is likely that as the study of his orchestration progresses, these conclusions will be more generally endorsed.

There is nothing striking in his piano style. (It will be remembered that he gave up composing piano music early in his career.) The *Pictures from an Exhibition* are the only work of any importance belonging to the period of his maturity. Then, too, he refrains (certainly not through lack of the special knowledge required) from resorting to virtuosic effects; and the music is not particularly pianistic. But it may be said that the piano, and especially its colour and resonance, is used far more subtly and to far better purpose in some of the songs: notably *Sunless*, 'Trepak', 'Death's Serenade', and, in a lighter vein, 'The Magpie' and 'The Garden by the Don'.

CHAPTER XIX

A Few Conclusions

Artistic heredity—The question of style—Influence on the ulterior course of musical art—Ever-increasing recognition of the artistic value of Mussorgsky's works

HOW far is the style whose principal idiosyncrasies have been considered related to that of Mussorgsky's predecessors and contemporaries? Its relation to Glinka's and Dargomyjsky's has been indicated. As regards Western masters, only four or five names suggest themselves.

The first is, naturally, Berlioz's. He influenced the whole group, and principally Balakiref and Rimsky-Korsakof. But, when it comes to Mussorgsky, we see forthwith that the difference of character and spirit are great enough for comparison to be impossible except so far as regards a few technicalities. There are few points of resemblance between his music and Berlioz's—*A Night on the Bare Mountain* excepted. In temperament and musical feeling, the two were diametrically opposed. Berlioz was in many important respects an innovator, but in other respects thoroughly conservative. He found intolerably harsh harmonies not only in Wagner's music, but also in Beethoven's, and his music has none of the terseness of Mussorgsky's. On the other hand, one notices curious resemblances between their respective personalities.

They are the only two great composers whose technical ability and artistic outlook are likely to remain for ever a subject of dispute. Many experienced judges regard Berlioz as having but a poor sense of harmony and modulation, and like Mussorgsky he has been criticized for his basses and his fondness for chords in root position. Other equally competent judges contend that his harmonies are the only fitting ones, being "a question not so much of technique as of fundamental conception".*

Both are "isolated figures, to be judged without reference to any other composer";† both were praised—or blamed, as the case may be—for the part they played in the overthrowing of obsolete conventions; and both exercised, and still exercise, a considerable influence on the later evolution of music.

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* Ernest Newman in *Musical Studies*, 1903.

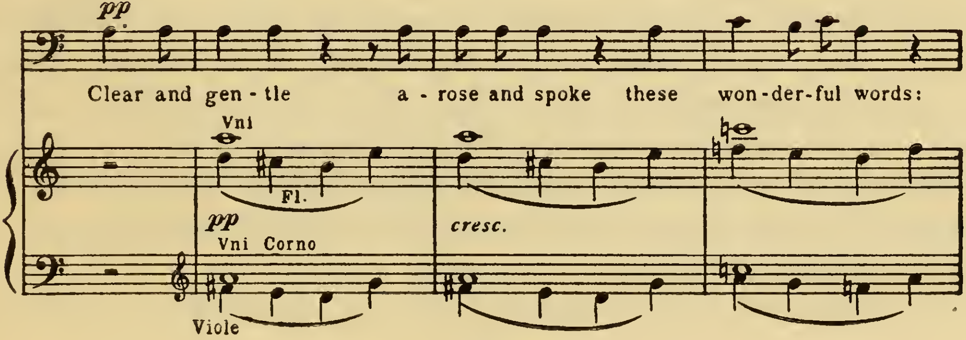
† Tom Wotton, of Berlioz, in *The Heritage of Music*, vol. ii, 1934.

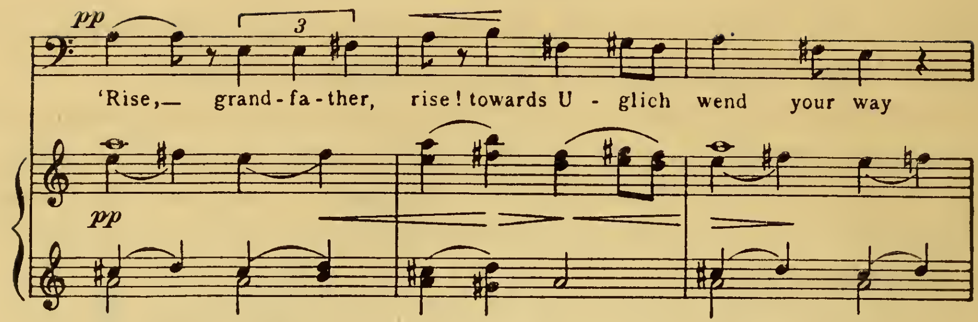
Then there is Schubert, whose bold innovations in the matter of harmony (notably in the use of pedal-points), key relationship, and tonal plans (his 'Liedesend' is the earliest instance of a song starting in one key and ending in another) are direct precedents for Mussorgsky's.

Schumann's harmonic style deeply impressed both Balakiref and Mussorgsky. It will be remembered that he was the first to end a song on a discord. More important are the unprecedented sensitiveness of his musical prosody, and the significance and independence of the piano part in his songs. A secondary proof of his influence on Mussorgsky is to be found in the Schumann-like turns that occur now and then in *Boris Godunof* (notably p. 65, l. 1—an unmistakable echo of the scherzo of the First Symphony—p. 246, l. 3, and p. 250, l. 3—reminiscent of 'Ich grolle nicht'), *Khovanshchina* (p. 55, ll. 1-2) and some of the songs. The point would hardly be worth noting but for the fact that turns definitely recalling another composer's music are very few in Mussorgsky's.

As already pointed out, his way of using leitmotives, allusions to and transformations of motives, is to be traced back to the example of Berlioz, Wagner, and Liszt jointly. Liszt influenced him far more directly and strongly than Berlioz or Wagner did, especially as regards harmony and instrumental style. The influence of the *Danse Macabre* has already been alluded to; and Karatyghin has expressed the view that the recurrence, in various of Mussorgsky's works, of patterns recalling the 'Dies Irae' (which is the basis of the *Danse Macabre*) may be traced back to it. The 'love for Feodor' theme in *Boris* closely recalls a theme in Liszt's *Eglogue*. And in Pimen's narrative in the council and death scene in *Boris* the beautiful passage:

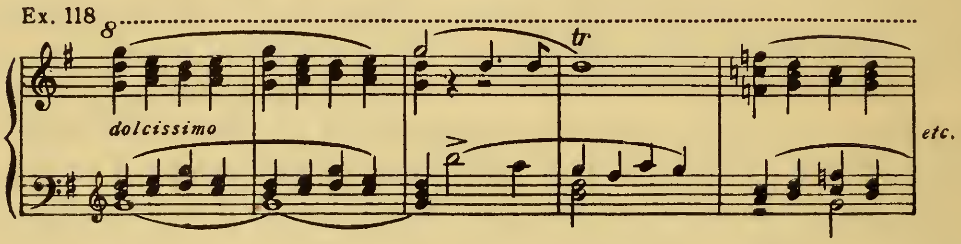
Ex. 117


pp
Clear and gen - tle a - rose and spoke these won-der-ful words:
Vni
Fl.
pp
cresc.
Vni Corno
Viole


pp
3
'Rise,— grand-fa-ther, rise! towards U - glich wend your way
pp

was borrowed (maybe unconsciously) from the death scene in the oratorio *Saint Elizabeth*:

Ex. 118



Lapshin was the first to discover this example—in all likelihood solitary in Mussorgsky's output—of a borrowing of both idea and, in a large measure, treatment.

But, all told, these are merely accessory (or perhaps it would be more accurate to say complementary) influences. The primary influence, the very *fons et origo* of Mussorgsky's art remains the native art of his people.

There remains to inquire whether, as often alleged, his music, despite its many virtues and signal originality, lacks that mysterious quality called style—a task that cannot be usefully undertaken unless the different meanings of the term be separated.

It may mean personal idiosyncrasy of expression; it may mean technique of expression as distinct from the things expressed, and in that sense can be discussed, as pointed out by J. Middleton Murry, only in relation to the exposition of intellectual ideas: not in relation to art, in which there is no discriminating between the expression and the thing expressed. And it can mean uniformity to some high standard (regarded, as often as not, as dependent upon certain conventional fixed laws) of excellence in form, diction, and so on.

The first sense is a matter of kind only. The last is mainly a matter of quality; and the fallacy and looseness of it have so often been expressed that one can but wonder how it can still survive. Middleton Murry, however, has succeeded in bringing out the fundamental truth behind the fallacy, thus: "Style, in the absolute sense, is a quality that transcends all personal idiosyncrasy, yet needs—or seems to need—personal idiosyncrasy in order to be manifested. It is a complete fusion of the personal and the universal, the complete realization of a universal significance in a personal and particular expression."

Let us attempt to achieve a solution of the problem of Mussorgsky's style according to the terms of this pregnant definition.

To say that he has a style of his own because his music can be differentiated from any other at a glance remains pointless: it merely implies that he has a manner, and manner depends upon marked idiosyncrasies of any sort, good or bad. To refer to the fact that his technique is characteristically his own and admirably suited to his own purposes is more useful up to a point, but leaves the question of quality untouched.

We shall go a long way towards a solution if we begin by admitting—as is only reasonable in the light of Middleton Murry's definition—that style depends not upon any outer aspect of homogeneity, order, or conformity to tradition, but upon the vitalizing function of the elements of a work and their interrelation; that it is, therefore, in Middleton Murry's words, "not an isolable quality", and "is perfect when the communication of the emotion in its particularity is exactly accomplished". Buffon's famous axiom: "Le style est de l'homme même" (not "Le style, c'est l'homme", as almost invariably misquoted) makes it clear that an artist's style is a matter not of general rules, nor of race or period characteristics (which may be taken for granted), but of individual intuition: so that we cannot assess it from outside. Outer characteristics play no greater part in Mussorgsky's style than they do in the style of the most conservatively minded of creative artists. However needful to his purpose the unwonted chords, concatenations and rhythms he used, and however much they contributed to make his style what it is, they are to be taken into account only so far as, by using them, he compels us to feel the particularity of his emotion. "Every work of enduring literature", Middleton Murry also says, "is not so much a triumph of language as a victory over language: a sudden injection of life-giving perceptions into a vocabulary that is, but for the energy of the creative writer, perpetually on the verge of exhaustion." Likewise, in music, every enduring achievement of the innovative order is not so much a victory of innovation as a sudden injection of life-giving perceptions into neologisms that, but for the energy of the creative composer, would not have justified their coming into being.

Mussorgsky uses unwonted devices in ways that make them appear natural, necessary, and indeed inevitable. And this is one of the essential conditions of the creative artist's victory. Carrying the definition of style a step further, we may posit that "in the best art we feel the effect without being conscious of the means used to produce it—sometimes indeed without being able, after all our study, to find them out". This is entirely true of Mussorgsky's art. Who, while listening to his music, notices either the extraordinary subtlety of the means by which certain of the effects are achieved, or their unusual rationale, as revealed by analysis? And how many listeners will discover on the spot the sins against conventional grammar on which censors have harped so persistently?

In *Boris Godunof* especially, that compound of tragedy and comedy, meditation and swift action, simplicity and complexity, descriptive characterization and emotional expression, picturesque evocations and revelations of human souls probed to the deep, nearly all the aspects of Mussorgsky's art—all, indeed, except for the purely spiritual, introspective moods, the sense of mystery manifested in the wonderful 'Elegy' and in 'On the River' (*Sunless*, Nos. 5 and 6) —can be studied; the lyrical, the realistic and the epic, the earnest, and (in the final version) the light. And the more we study them, the more clearly we realize the homogeneity of his style—a style based on the interplay of the most usual devices and thoroughly novel ones, which, contrasted or blended, co-operate in perfect harmony. It is this harmonious co-operation that is the essential feature, the one which enables us to decide that his music has style.

Failure to grasp this essential fact (coupled, maybe, with literal acceptance of Mussorgsky's diatribes against rules), has led certain critics to liken him to those amateur composers who, not being restrained by a sense of responsibility and measure, often hit upon remarkably original and useful ideas, but remain incapable of putting them to good use, of fusing them into a style. These critics seem to believe that this view is justified by the extent of Mussorgsky's influence upon composers of the following generations and upon the formation of the modern idiom. It is true that practically all the distinctive features of his diction and style have become current coinage. This means, of course, that whereas he used them but occasionally, the use of them has become more or less systematic. The earliest to show signs of his influence were Liadof (to a slight extent), Debussy, and Ravel. Ravel studied his music eagerly; although uncompromising in his dislike of clumsiness and crudeness, he found no fault with this music and was one of the first to stand up for the genuine *Boris* against the revised. And this influence has spread, indirectly, even to composers who never paid any particular attention to his music: Bartók and Kodály among others. It was not in technical matters only that others followed his lead, often without being aware that they were doing so. Wolfurt, for instance, is entirely right in saying that "Hugo Wolf in his songs continued Mussorgsky's realism, although in all likelihood he never came across any of his works". It is not possible to ascertain whether Janáček studied Mussorgsky, to whose music his—except that much of it is modal and that it shows an utter disregard of text-book rules—bears as little resemblance as Wolf's does. Yet, he had similar realistic and national ambitions; and his spiritual affinities are further revealed by these lines from his pen: "To every word the folk utters is attached a fragment of national life. Therefore, the melody of their speech should be studied with care."

But stressing his importance as a precursor or pioneer often led to beclouding his importance as a creator of music that is profoundly significant and thoroughly satisfying. This music would ultimately have been acknowledged as such even if it had exercised no specific influence whatsoever. Unquestionably, the fact that his most venturesome processes have become everyday usage has rid most of us of the superstitious mistrust that his contemporaries felt bound to evince. But even among the critics who remained most uncompromising on the subject of his shortcomings, none of those who were musically gifted or really sensitive to music—Rimsky-Korsakof, for instance, who never dreamt that he could have an artistic posterity, or Ernest Newman, who began by regarding him as "half a musician only"—could help paying tribute to its beauty and power.

KEY TO BIBLIOGRAPHICAL SOURCES REFERRED TO IN THE TEXT

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1.	VSM	Vladimir V. Stassof, *Modest Petrovitch Mussorgsky*, St. Petersburg, 1881.
2.	RMG	*Russian Musical Gazette* (*Russkaya Muzykalnaya Gazeta*).
3.	MAM	*M. P. Mussorgsky: Articles and Materials* (in Russian), edited by Y. Keldysh and V. Yakovlev, Moscow 1932.
4.	MLD	*M. P. Mussorgsky: Letters and Documents*, edited by A. Rimsky-Korsakof (in Russian), Moscow, 1932.
5.	PAM	Pierre d'Alheim, *Moussorgski*, Paris, 1896.
6.	CAMRM	M. D. Calvocoressi and Gerald Abraham, *Masters of Russian Music*, London, 1936.
7.	KVS	Karenin, *Vladimir Stasov*, Leningrad, 1927.
8.	GMBG GMB	Robert Godet, *En Marge de Boris Godounof*, London, 1926.
9.	YIT	*Yearbook of the Imperial Theatres* (in Russian).
10.	GBVA	Same as 26.
11.	CKTH	Kœchlin, *Traité d'harmonie*, Paris.
12.	ORM	Oskar von Riesemann, *Mussorgski*, Munich, 1926.
13.	KWM	Kurt von Wolfurt, *Mussorgskij*, Berlin, 1927.
14.	ILRS	
15.	RKM	Rimsky-Korsakof: *Chronicle of my Musical Life* (in Russian), Moscow, fifth edition, 1935.
16.	MCM	Mussorgsky number of *Muzykalny Sovremennik*, Petrograd, 1917.
17.	MCMM	Same as 16.
18.	PMA	*Proceedings of the Musical Association.*
19.	FMYY	Findeisen, *Mussorgsky's Childhood and Youth* (in 9. for 1911).
20.	KRFM	Kastalsky, *Peculiarities of Russian Folk-Music* (in Russian), Moscow, 1923.
21.	EMC	Calvocoressi, *La Musique à programme*, in La Laurencie's *Encyclopédie de la Musique*, II. 6, Paris, 1931.
22.	SEFS	Cecil Sharp, *English Folk Song*, London, 1907.

23.	DNM	Dyson, *The New Music*, London, 1924.
24.	MTNM	
25.	KRLM	Keldysh, *Mussorgsky's Songs*, Moscow, 1933.
26.	BGVA	*Boris Godunof: articles and studies* (in Russian), Moscow, 1930.
27.	MLO	Same as MLD.
28.	VKM	V. Karatyghin: *Mussorgsky*, Petrograd, 1922.
29.	CBS	*Correspondence of V. V. Stassof and M. A. Balakiref* (in Russian), Moscow, 1935.
30.	ILPRN	Same as 14.
31.	MNGK	Arseny Golenishchef-Kutuzof, *Reminiscences of M. P. Mussorgsky* (in Russian), in *Muzykalnoe Nasledstvo*, I, Moscow, 1935.
32.	MTLL	
33.	YRRK	V. V. Yastrebtsef: *My Reminiscences of Rimsky-Korsakof* (in Russian), Petrograd, 1917.
34.	LLGM	La Laurencie, *Le Goût musical en France*, Paris, 1905.
35.	ARKL	A. Rimsky-Korsakof, *N. A. Rimsky-Korsakof: Life and Works* (in Russian). Five vols., Moscow, 1933–46.
36.	RRHO	Romain Rolland, *Histoire de l'Opéra en Europe*, Paris, 1895.
37.	BGAI	
38.	LLR	Lionel de la Laurencie, *Rameau*, Paris, 1908.
39.	MDCM	M. D. Calvocoressi, *Moussorgsky*, Paris, 1908.
40.	MBGV	Same as 26.
41.	CMR	César Cui, *La Musique en Russie*, Paris, 1880.
42.	BGA	
43.	GKW	Golenishchef-Kutuzof, *Works* (in Russian), St. Petersburg, 1914.

CATALOGUE OF MUSSORGSKY'S WORKS

(This catalogue is taken largely from *Mussorgsky* by M. D. Calvocoressi and Gerald Abraham ('Master Musicians'' series) by kind permission of the publishers, Messrs. J. M. Dent & Sons, of Gerald Abraham and of the editor of the series, Eric Blom.)

WORKS FOR THE STAGE

Hans d'Islande (projected opera after Victor Hugo's novel) (1856).

Oedipus Rex (choruses for a projected opera on Ozerof's play (1858–60).

St. John's Night (projected opera, after Gogol's story) (1858).

Salammbô (unfinished opera, after Flaubert's novel) (1863–6).

The Marriage (setting of the first act of Gogol's comedy) (1868).

Boris Godunof (after Pushkin's play and Karamzin's *History of the Russian State*) (first version, 1868–9; second version, 1871–2).

Bobyl (The Landless Peasant) (projected opera after Spielhagen's novel *Hans und Grete*) (1870).

Mlada (scenes for the second and third acts of the collective opera-ballet) (1872).

Khovanshchina (unfinished opera) (1872–80).

The Sorotchintsi Fair (unfinished opera, after Gogol's story) (1874–80).

Pugachevshchina (projected opera, possibly after Pushkin's *History of the Pugachef Rising* and his story 'The Captain's Daughter') (1877).

ORCHESTRAL WORKS

Scherzo in B flat major (1858).

Alla marcia notturna (1861).

Andante, Scherzo and Finale of Symphony in D major (1861–2).

A Night on the Bare Mountain (1867).

'Intermezzo symphonique in modo classico' (orchestral version of the piano piece, with additional trio) (1867).

Podĕbrad (projected symphonic poem) (1867).

Triumphal march, 'The Capture of Kars' (also known as 'March, with trio *alla turca*', partly based on the Procession of Princes from *Mlada*) (1880).

Transcaucasian Suite (projected work for orchestra with harps and piano) (1880).

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'Shamyl's March', for soloists, chorus and orchestra (1859).

The Destruction of Sennacherib (after Byron), for chorus and orchestra (first version, 1867; second version, 1874).

'Jesus Navinus' (or 'Joshua'), for alto and bass soloists, chorus and piano (1874–7).

Three Vocalises for three-part female voices (1880).

Five Russian Folksongs (No. 5 unfinished), arranged for four-part male voices (1880).

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(The names within brackets refer to the authors of the words.)

'Where art thou, little star?' (Grekof) (1857; revised, with orchestral accompaniment, 1958).

'Tell me gentle maiden' (anon.) (1858).

'Du Meines Herzens Sehnusucht' (anon.) (1858).

'The Merry Hour' (Koltsof) (first version 1858; second version 1859).

'The leaves rustled sadly' (adapted from Pleshcheef) (1859).

'What are words of love to you?' (Ammosof) (1860).

'I own many palaces' (Koltsof) (1863).

'Old Man's Song' (also known as 'The Harper's Song: An die Türen will ich schleichen' from Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*) (1863).

'King Saul' (adapted from Kozlof's translation of Byron) (both versions 1863).

'But if I could meet thee again' (Kurochkin) (1863).

'Wild winds blowing' (Koltsof) (1864).

'Night' (after Pushkin) (both versions 1864; first version orchestrated 1868).

'Kallistratushka' (Nekrassof) (both versions 1864).

'Prayer' (Lermontof) (1865).

'The Outcast Woman: a study in recitative' (I.G.M.) (1865).

'Cradle Song' from Ostrovsky's 'Voevoda' ('Peasant's Lullaby') (both versions 1865).

'Why do thine eyes reproach me?' (Little One) (Pleshcheef) (1866).

'Ich wollt' meine Schmerzen ergrössen' (Heine) (1866).

'Aus meinen Tränen' (Heine) (1866).

'Savishna' (composer) (1866).

'You drunken sot' (composer) (1866).

'The Seminarist' (composer) (1866).

'Hopak' from Shevchenko's 'Haydamaki' (trans. Mey) (1866; revised, with orchestral accompaniment, 1868).

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'The Magpie' (on two poems by Pushkin) (1867).

'Gathering Mushrooms' (Mey) (1867).

'The Banquet' (Koltsof) (1867).

'The Urchin' (composer) (1867).

'The He-Goat; a wordly story' (composer) (1867).
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'Garden by the Don' (Koltsof) (1867).
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'Yeremushka's Lullaby' (Nekrassof) (1868).
'Child's Song' (Mey) (1868).
Nursery (composer): 'With Nanny' (1868), 'In the Corner', 'The Cockchafer', 'With the doll' and 'Going to Sleep' (1870), 'The Hobby-Horse' and 'Matros the cat' (1872).
'The Peep-show' (composer) (1870).
'Evening Prayer' (ascribed to Pleshcheef (1871).
Sunless (Golenishchef-Kutozof): 'Between four walls', 'Thou didst not know me in the crowd', 'The idle, noisy day is ended', 'Boredom', 'Elegy' and 'On the River' (1874).
'Forgotten' (Golenishchef-Kutuzof) (1874).
'The Epitaph' (unfinished) (composer) (1874).
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Songs and Dances of Death (Golenishchef-Kutuzof): 'Lullaby', 'Serenade' and 'Trepak' (1875), 'The Field-Marshal' (1877).
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'Not like thunder from heaven' (Alexeï Tolstoi) (1877).
'Softly the spirit flew up to heaven' (Alexeï Tolstoi) (1877).
'Pride' (Alexeï Tolstoi) (1877).
'Is spinning man's work?' (Alexeï Tolstoi) (1877).
'It scatters and breaks' (Alexeï Tolstoi) (1877).
'Vision' (Golenishchev-Kutuzof) (1877).
'The Wanderer' (Rückert, trans. Pleshcheef) (1878).
'Song of the Flea' (Goethe, trans. Strugovshchikof) (1879).
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'Souvenir d'Enfance' (1857).
Scherzo and Finale of Sonata in E flat major (lost) (1858).
Sonata in F sharp minor (lost) (1858).
Scherzo in C sharp minor (1858).
'Impromptu passionné' (1859).
'Kinderscherz' ('Children's Games: Puss in the Corner') (1859; revised 1860).
'Preludio in modo classico' (lost) (1860).
'Intermezzo in modo classico' (1861).
'Menuet Monstre' (lost) (1861).

Scherzo of a Sonata in D (lost) (1862) (possibly identical with the lost scherzo of the Symphony in D major).

'From the recollections of my childhood': 'Nurse and I' and 'First Punishment: Nurse shuts me in the Dark Room' (1865).

'Duma' (Rêverie) (on a theme by V. A. Loginof) (1865).

'La Capricieuse' (on a theme by Count L. Heyden) (1865).

Scherzino, 'The Seamstress' (1871).

Pictures from an Exhibition, suite (1874).

Fantasy, 'Storm on the Black Sea' (lost) (1879).

'On the Southern Shore of the Crimea' (two pieces, generally known as 'Gurzuf' and 'Capriccio') (1880).

'Meditation' (Album leaf) (1880).

'Une Larme' (1880).

'Au Village' (Quasi Fantasia) (?1880).

'Fair Scene' and 'Hopak' (from *The Sorotchintsi Fair*) (arranged by Mussorgsky).

PIANO DUET

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GENERAL INDEX

Abarinova (singer), 175
Abraham, Gerald, 82, 90, 214, 255, 299
'Album of Child Life', see *Nursery* song-set
Alceste (Gluck), 30, 93
Alexandrof, Dimitri, 168
Alexeief, M. P., 7
Alla marcia notturna, 43–4
'Allegro', 29, 39, 50
'Andante', 40, 43, 44, 45
Angelo (Cui), 128
Annals of a Sportsman (Turgenief), 85
Antar (Rimsky-Korsakof), 100, 102–5
Antokolsky, 125
Armide (Gluck), 30
Arnold, Yuri, 21
Arsenief, 44
Artusi (critic), 92
Assafief, Boris, 229
'At the Sewing-machine' (Von Madeweiss), 8
Auber, Daniel François, 177, 197
Autobiographical sketches, 1–8
'Aux Tuileries', 264
Azantchevsky, Michael, 17

'Baba yaga', 264, 297
Bach, J. S., 5, 24, 45, 75, 244
Baïdary, 4, 202
Baïf, Jean Antoine de, 92, 93
Balakiref, Mily, 2, 3, 6, 8, 9, 20–35, 37–45, 48–51, 53, 57, 60, 66, 68, 69, 76, 78–80, 82–3, 103, 106, 117, 118, 121–2, 135, 169, 188, 195–9, 203, 207, 210, 216, 217, 226, 241, 294, 297, 302, 303
Bamberg, Malvina, 25
'Banquet, The', 9, 71, 112, 257, 259, 298
Barber of Baghdad, The (Cornelius), 229
Bardi, Count, 91, 92
Barson, R., 221
Bartók, Béla, 307
Baskin (critic), 177
Baughan, E. A., 224
Beethoven, Ludwig van, 2, 5, 15, 18, 24, 29, 30, 42, 45, 50, 60, 69, 70, 75, 82, 125, 244, 270, 300, 302
Bellini, Vincenzo, 235, 255
Berg, Alban, 271
Berlioz, Hector, 3*n.*, 5, 24, 42*n.*, 50, 69, 78, 82, 90, 122, 125, 143, 225, 235, 244, 275, 281, 282, 300, 302–3
Bertenson, Lev, 207
Bertenson, Vassili, 198
Bessel (publisher), 33*n.*, 128, 132, 135, 171–2, 176, 187, 191, 214, 215, 219, 227
Betz (conductor), 156
Bielinsky, Vissarion, 87
Birjevye Viedomosti, 176
Blake, William, 229
Blom, Eric, 143, 167
Bobyl, 118
Bogomolof (architect), 210
Boieldieu, François Adrien, 244
Boris Godunof, 3, 6, 9, 11, 25, 33, 49, 51, 63, 67, 76–7, 80, 81, 85, 86, 89, 94, 97, 105, 108, 109, 112, 113, 115–17, 120–1, 124, 127, 128, 132, 137–56, 182–6, 192, 193, 199, 210, 212–13, 215–31, 235, 239, 247–55, 258–70, 272–3, 275–86, 291, 292, 294, 296, 299–300, 303, 306–7; excerpts performed in public, 121–2, 134, 169, 170, 181, 196, 197; first cast of, 175; performances of, 129, 136, 174–81, 193, 195, 217, 218, 222; publication of, 129, 134, 171–3, 219, 223, 227–9; second version, 157–73; story and scenes, 139–42
Borodin, Alexander, 8, 18, 22, 29, 35–6, 50, 57, 60, 65, 66*n.*, 75, 83, 96, 106, 121, 122–3, 155, 168, 169, 199, 200, 210, 226, 242, 295, 296
Borozdin, Nikolaï, 24, 45*n.*
Bortniansky, Dimitri, 17
Botcharof (theatrical designer), 176
Bourgault-Ducoudray, Louis Albert, 221
Brahms, Johannes, 225
Brayer, Jules de, 220
Bruckner, Anton, 229, 230
Bruneau, Alfred, 221
Buffon, George Louis, 305
Bulakhof (singer), 175
Burns, Robert, 255
'Bydlo', 264
Byron, George, Lord, 4, 9, 68
'By the Walls of Kazan' (*Boris*), 137–8, 142, 171, 256, 265

Caccini, Giulio, 91
Capell, Richard, 224

'Capricieuse, La', 63
'Captain's Daughter, The' (Pushkin), 193
Carraud, Gaston, 222, 231
Catalogues of Mussorgsky's works, 1, 7, 8–11
Charles IX, 92
Chausson, Ernest, 221
'Child's Song', 4, 9, 10, 96, 101, 293
'Child with his nurse', 9
Chopin, Frédéric François, 24, 41, 42, 200, 244
Cinna, 30
'Classicist, The', 4, 9, 11, 70, 95, 119, 120, 231
'Cockchafer, The', 9, 11
Colles, H. C., 226
Concert Rondo (Hertz), 2, 15
Cornelius, Peter, 229
Corsi, Jacopo, 91
Cossack Poet, The (operetta), 191
Cui, César, 2, 3, 8, 20, 21, 22, 24–5, 31–2, 42*n.*, 43, 46, 50, 51, 60, 61, 65, 66, 71, 73, 94, 96, 97, 100, 101, 103, 106, 108, 115, 116–17, 122–3, 128, 167, 174, 177–80, 188, 199, 210, 214, 216

Dafne (Gagliano), 92
Dafne (Peri), 92
D'Alheim, Marie Olenine, 220–1, 223
Pierre, 14, 220–1, 226
Damnation de Faust (Berlioz), 122
Dannreuther, Edward, 224
Danse Macabre (Liszt), 303
Danses Macabres Russes, 4, 6, (see also *Songs and Dances of Death*)
Dante Alighieri, 91
Dargomyjsky, Alexander, 2, 6, 17, 19–22, 24, 32*n.*, 35, 45*n.*, 50, 57, 69, 82, 94, 96, 98, 103, 106, 108, 111, 112–13, 115–16, 125, 142, 174, 176, 186, 197, 199, 207, 235, 261, 265, 274, 302
Darwin, Charles, 125
'Death's Lullaby', 259, 283, 293, 297, 298
'Death's Serenade', 293, 301
Debussy, Achille Claude, 108, 221, 246, 269, 271, 275, 281, 307
Dehn, Siegfried Wilhelm, 20
Demidof, Grigory, 19, 41
Demon, The (Rubinstein), 181
'Derelict, The, 281
Destouches, Franz von, 92
Destruction of Sennacherib, 4, 9, 10, 68, 135, 206
Diaghilef, Serge, 222, 223, 231
D'Indy, Vincent, 108, 223, 224
Dinjikof (singer), 175
Divina Commedia, 91
'Dnieper, The' 67, 81, 263
Don Quixote (Strauss), 89
Dostoevsky, Fedor, 3*n.*, 48, 84, 86, 176, 206, 210
'Dream', 114
'Duma', 63
Dyson (*The New Music*), 270, 275

EASTERN MUSIC, 29, 51, 52, 67, 123, 193
Eglogue (Liszt), 303
'Elegy', 293, 297, 298, 306
Encyclopaedia Britannica, 87
En Marge de Boris Godunof (Godet), 198, 223, 227
'Epitaph, The', 298
Esmeralda (Dargomyjsky), 21, 22
Euridice (Peri), 91
'Evening Prayer', 9, 11

FAMYNTSIN, ALEXANDER, 70, 119, 176, 178
Fauré, Gabriel, 250
Faust (Gounod), 174, 180
Faust Symphony (Liszt), 238
'Feast, The', 10, 285
Fedorova, Maria Izmailovna, 189–91
Ferrero, Giovanni, 156
Field, John, 2, 15
'Field Marshal Death', 185, 254, 259
'Fileuse, La', 4
Filippof, Terty, 195, 197, 203, 204, 207, 208, 215
Findeisen, Nikolai, 16, 17, 47, 48, 67, 218, 221
Fire-bird, The (Balakiref), 96
Flaubert, Gustave, 8, 11, 56, 62
Foester, Charles, 221
Folk-music, Russian, 82–3, 236–44, 254–7, 260, 290, 291
'Foma Pizzicato', 177, 178
'Forgotten', 4, 11, 197, 272, 297, 298
Fortunato, Sofia, 36–7, 201
Fowler, H. W. and F. G., 59
Francs-Juges Overture (Berlioz), 143–4
Free School of Music, 9, 68, 69, 80, 121, 169, 181, 196, 202, 206
'From the recollections of my childhood', 63
'Funeral Epistle', 184

GAGLIANO, MARCO DA, 92
Galilei, Vincenzo, 91
'Garden by the Don', 71, 81, 168, 298, 301
'Gate of the Bogatyrs, The', 297

'Gathering Mushrooms', 4, 9, 10, 71 112, 260, 282, 298
Gedeonof, 122, 155, 173
Germany, interest in Russian music, 226–7
Gervinus, George Gottfried, 86
Gevaert, François Auguste, 93
Ginzburg (sculptor), 210
Gliebof, Igor, 27, 86, 90 245, 300
Gliebova, 32, 38
Glinka, Mikhail, 3, 14, 17, 20, 21, 22, 24, 31, 40, 42*n.*, 50, 59, 64–5, 69, 82, 104, 117, 125, 131, 162, 174, 178, 197, 199, 203, 210, 212, 235, 236, 244, 245, 278, 282, 295, 302
Gluck, Christoph Willibald, 5, 30, 50, 82, 92–3, 174, 225
'Gnomes', 259, 264
Godet, Robert, 7, 8, 45*n.*, 48, 130, 150*n.*, 198, 220, 223, 227, 231
Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von, 4, 61, 202
Gogol, Nikolai, 9, 10, 11, 25, 31, 84, 87, 95, 96, 97, 99, 101–2, 105, 108, 125 183
Golenishchef-Kutuzof, Count 4, 11, 134, 162–4, 189, 192–4, 207
Golos, 170, 176
Goossens, Eugene, 228
Gounod, Charles François, 174–5, 180, 199, 271*n.*
Grajdanin, 177
'Grasshopper, The', 4
Grétry, André, 92
Griboiedof, Alexander, 123
Gridnin, Feodor, 198
Grigorovitch, 3, 82, 85
'Gurzuf', 4, 202

Haidamaks (Shevtchenko), 9
Handel, George Frederick, 24, 119, 244
Handel and Shakespeare (Gervinus), 86
Hans d'Islande (Hugo), 8, 22
Hans und Grete, 118
'Harper's Song, The', 271, 299
Hartmann, Victor, 4, 11, 135, 182
Haydn, Joseph, 24
'Hebrew Song', 4, 9, 71, 81, 292, 298
'He-Goat, The', 9, 10, 71, 95, 96, 112, 162
Heine, Heinrich, 31
Herke, Anton, 2, 15, 17, 18, 68
Herz, Henri, 2, 15
Herzen, Alexander, 33
Hindemith, Paul, 275
'Hobby-horse, The,' 114
Holbach, Baron, 45*n.*, 57
Homer, 125
'Hopak', 4, 7, 9, 10, 67, 96, 197, 213, 260, 297
Hostile Power (Serof), 174
Howes, Frank, 83
Hugo, Victor, 8, 21, 22

IMPERIAL THEATRES, 43, 122, 135, 155, 169, 170*n.*, 196, 210, 219
'Impromptu passionné', 4, 33, 34, 50
'I'm riding to Yukka', 11
Incoronazione di Poppea, d', 92
'Intermezzo', 4, 8, 10, 43, 50, 51, 61, 73, 74–5, 199, 297
'In the Corner', 9, 11
'I own many palaces', 81, 293
Iphigénie en Aulide, 30, 93
Ippolitof-Ivanof, Mikhail, 97, 198, 207, 233
Islamey (Balakiref), 51, 68*n.*
Ivanof, M., 207, 208*n.*
Izoulet, Jean, 221

JANÁČEK, LEOS, 274, 307
Jemtchujnikof (poet), 203
'Jesus Navinus', 4
'Jewish Song', 9, 10, 112, 263
Johansen (music publisher), 7, 112
'Joshua', 10, 67, 193, 199
'Joyless', 298
Judith, 57–9, 60, 67, 174
Julius Caesar, 101

'KALLISTRAT', 9, 63, 95
'Kallistratushka', 255, 256, 257, 283, 297, 298, 299
Karamzin, Nikolai, 138, 159
Karatyghin, V., 12, 13, 15, 33*n.*, 44, 47, 107, 108, 186, 214
Karenin, Vladimir, 1, 3*n.*, 4*n.*, 5, 7, 8, 82
Karevo, 13, 43, 44, 64
Karmalina, Liubov, 20, 183, 185, 186
Kashkin (critic), 219, 232
Kashperof, Vladimir, 174
Kastalsky, Alexander, 242
Kavelin, Constantine, 3, 85–6
Keldysh, 163, 239
Kherson, 200, 201
Khovanshchina, 3, 4, 6, 11, 14, 33, 65, 82, 89, 118, 121, 123, 124, 126, 127, 132, 133, 135, 164, 182–3, 185–7, 191–3, 195–7, 199, 200, 202–4, 211–13, 217, 225, 228, 242, 244, 247, 250, 254, 259, 262–7, 272, 275, 276, 284–6, 290, 295, 303
Khovansky, Prince Ivan, 123, 211
'Kinderscherz', 4, 8, 10, 34, 39, 40, 50, 51
King Lear Overture, 40

'King Saul', 4, 8, 10, 52–5, 81, 230, 252, 270, 299
'Knights' Gate at Kief, The', 182
Kodály, Zoltan, 307
Koechlin, Charles, 109–10, 280
Koltzof, Alexeï, 293
Komarof, Pension, 16
Komarova, Varvara, 1*n.*, 112, 113
Komissarjevsky (singer), 3, 169, 170, 175
Kompaneisky, 15, 17, 20, 29, 60, 67, 68, 184, 187, 194, 207
Kondratief, Gennadi, 170, 175
Korsof, B. 197
Kostiurina, Elizabeth, 189
  Maria, 189–91
Kostomarof, Nikolai, 3, 82, 85
Kruglikof, Simon, 216, 218
Krupsky, Father, 2, 6, 17
Krutikova (singer), 197
Kuhnau, Johann, 89

LALO, PIERRE, 222, 224
Lamansky, Vladimir, 3, 82, 85
Lamm, Paul, 219, 228, 229
Lapshin, 46, 48, 50, 86, 90, 198, 205, 240*n.*, 266, 290, 304
Laroche (critic), 119, 170–1, 176, 178, 179, 184, 201
Latysheva (singer), 47
Lavater, Johann Kaspar, 31
Lavrof, Nikolai, 195, 198
Lavrovskaya (singer), 175
'Leaves rustled sadly, The', 34, 55, 298
Lecerf de la Viéville, 92
Leningrad, Conservatoire, 195, 215, 230; library, 138, 172
Lenormand, René, 280
Leonova, Daria, 3, 4, 82, 96, 170, 187, 195, 197–202, 204, 205, 206
Lermontof, Mikhail Ivanovitch, 30, 125
Levatchef, Nikolai, 62
Liadof, Constantine, 8, 32, 43, 175, 214, 219, 232, 241, 282, 307
Liapunof, Sergei, 42*n.*, 79
Life for the Tsar, A (Glinka), 32, 69, 174, 180, 191
Liszt, Franz von, 2, 3*n.*, 5, 24, 42*n.*, 50, 52, 54, 68, 78, 82, 111, 132–3, 199, 200, 238, 244, 257, 297, 303
'Little Evening Song', 120
'Little Star', 51–3, 63, 146, 230, 255, 263
Lobkovsky, Nikolai, 62
Lodyjensky, 160
Loghinof, Viatcheslaf, Leonid and Peter, 62
Lomakin (conductor), 9
London, *Boris Godunof* in, 223–6, 228
'Lord of my days', 39, 40
Lukashevitch, 3, 169, 170
'Lullaby', 9, 10
Lully, Jean-Baptiste, 92

MADEWEISS, GEORG VON, 4, 8, 45*n.*
'Magpie, The', 9, 10, 71, 81, 265, 266, 296, 301
Maid of Pskof, The (Rimsky-Korsakof), 96, 100, 116, 120, 168, 170, 173, 174, 175, 180, 255
Makarof, 176
Makovsky family, 155
Malherbe, Charles, 7
Malko, Nikolai, 74, 298
Mamontof, 219
Mandarin's Son, The (Cui), 25
Manfred, 37
Manjean (conductor), 156
Marfa's love-song (*Khovanshchina*), 192 197, 202, 213, 240*n.*, 254, 260, 265, 295
Marinsky Theatre, 32, 120, 134, 136, 170, 171, 174, 191, 192, 195, 217
Marnold, Jean, 222, 231
Marriage, The, 9, 11, 74, 76, 95, 96–113, 115, 143–4, 214, 227, 232, 250, 259, 260, 264, 269, 295
'Matros, the cat', 114
Matveief (singer), 175
Meligalis (composer), 228
Melnikof (singer), 175
Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, Felix, 35, 41, 42, 70
Mengden, 38, 39
'Menuet Monstre', 4
'Menuetto', 8
'Merry Hour, The', 34, 286
Mey, 4
Meyendorf, Baroness, 132
Meyerbeer, Giacomo, 59, 67, 163, 174, 197, 199
Mignon (Thomas), 174
Minkino, 78
'Misfortune', 298
'Misfortune of Being Intelligent, The', 123
'Misunderstood One, The', 191
Mlada, 11, 76, 122, 123, 205, 206, 213, 217
Molas, Alexandra, 1, 193, 209
Molière, Jean-Baptiste, 109, 110
Monastyref, Roman Vassilievitch, 12
Moniuszko, Stanislaw, 3, 24
Monteverdi, Claudio, 92
Mordovtsef, D. L., 159
Moscow, *Boris* produced at, 218–19; Conservatoire, 20; Kremlin, 29, 32; Mussorgsky's visits to, 32–3, 40–3, 49; Pissemsky in, 85; Private Opera Co., 217

Motte, Houdard de la, 93
Mottl, Felix, 229
‘Mound of Nettles, The’, 11, 119–20
Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus, 24, 30, 94
Murry, J. Middleton, 86, 304–5
Musical Times, 224, 225, 226, 228*n.*
Mussorgsky, Julia, 2, 12, 15, 61, 63, 64, 65
Mussorgsky, Modest, ancestry and birth, 2, 12–13; autobiographical sketches, *q.v.*; as accompanist, 187; as amateur actor, 31, 46; as pianist, 46, 199; becomes Balakiref’s pupil, 2, 27–8; catalogues of his works, 1, 8–11; character of, 46–8, 209; childhood and early youth, 1–3, 12–26; civil service appointments, 62, 70–1, 78–9, 97, 112, 117–8, 130, 132, 135, 187, 192, 195, 203; composes *Boris*, 137–56; composes *Khovanshchina*, 123–7, 182–5, 191, 203-5, 211; composes *The Marriage*; death of, 207–10; début as composer, 37; descriptions of, 18–19, 35–6, 69 (Borodin), 113–14 (Komarova), 68 (Kompaneisky), 65 (Liudmila Shestakova), 112–13 (Nadejda Rimsky-Korsakof), 36–7 (Sofia Fortunato); dipsomania and decline in health, 19, 64, 129, 134–5, 184–5, 187, 194–8, 205, 210; estrangement from Balakiref, 80; ‘finger-prints’, 265-8; founds school of singing with Leonova, 205; Guards commission resigned, 30, 49; influence of contemporary writers on, 3, 82, 85–6; influence of Russian folk-music on, 82–3, 234–44, 254–7, 260; letters of (extracts), 29–35, 40–2, 44–5, 57–61, 69–80 98–105, 108, 116, 122–8, 131–5, 155, 164, 171–2, 179–80, 183–5, 187–8, 190–2, 199–201, 203–4; lives in ‘community’ in Petersburg, 62, 64; lives with Naumof, 189; lives with Rimsky-Korsakof, 121, 134; loss of family property, 43, 44, 60–1, 64; maturity, 81; Moscow visits, 32, 40–3, 49; monument to, 210; nervous breakdowns, 8, 30, 31, 37–8, 47; realism in his music, 86–95; refuses to visit Liszt with Stassof, 132–3; remodels *Boris*, 120, 159–68; Serof’s *Judith* criticised by, 57–9; technique and style, 49–56, 234–307, 301 (piano style); tour with Leonova, 4, 197–202; views on art, 5; views on ‘German routine’, 70, 74, 75
Mussorgsky, Peter, 2, 12–13, 15, 18
Mussorgsky, Philaret, 1, 13, 15, 29, 30, 31*n.*, 37, 41, 43–4, 61, 64
Mussorgsky: Letters and Documents, 118
Muzykalny Listok, 172, 176
Muzykalny Sviet, 176

NANNY AND I’, 63
Napravnik, Eduard, 121, 156, 162, 169, 170, 174, 175, 179, 230
Naumof Paul, 1, 189–91, 194, 199
Naumova, Elizabeth Izmailovna, 189
Nekrassof, Nikolai, 4, 9, 257
Neronof, 203
Newman, Ernest, 167, 225, 265, 302*n.*, 307
Newmarch, Rosa, 224
Nicholas, Emperor, 2
‘Night’ fantasy, 4, 8, 10, 63, 81, 96, 269, 292, 295, 297
Night in May, A (Rimsky-Korsakof), 216
Night on the Bare Mountain, A, 9, 14, 25, 31, 38–9, 67–8, 71–4, 76–8, 123, 183, 186, 196, 205, 213, 217, 234, 295, 297–8, 300, 302
Nijni-Novgorodians, The (Napravnik), 174
Nikolaevitch, Grand-Duke Constantine, 121
Nikolaïef, 200, 201
Nikolsky, Vladimir, 3, 6, 14, 64, 65, 71, 73, 90, 101, 102, 109, 118, 137, 159, 189, 234
Nilsson, Christine, 174
‘Not like thunder from heaven’, 19
Novoe Vremya, 207, 209*n*
‘Nuages’, 269
Nursery song-set, 11, 14, 96, 113–14, 128, 131, 132, 201, 258, 269, 297

OBOLENSKY, NICHOLAS, 19
Oedipus Rex, 8, 28, 29, 30, 31, 38–9, 40, 43, 50, 55–6
Old Believers, 118, 123, 183, 185, 211, 213
‘Old Believers’ Song’, 11
Oleg (Sarti), 136
‘On the River’, 260, 272, 279, 292, 297, 298, 306
Opotchinin, Alexander, 97, 112, 118
Opotchinina, Nadejda, 34, 47, 97, 183
Opritchnik (Tchaikovsky), 128
Orfei, 176
Orfeo (Gluck), 174
Orlof, 19
‘Orphan, The’, 4, 9, 10, 62, 81, 96, 101, 231, 271, 293, 298
Ostrovsky, Alexander, 9
‘Outcast Woman, The’, 63
Oxford History of Music, 224
Ozerof, 28

PALESTRINA, JOHN PETER LOUIS, 5
Paletchek (singer), 175
Pamphlet music, 118–20
Pâquerette (Pugny), 38
Pargolovo, 131, 155
Paride ed Elena, 93
Paris, *Boris* in, 218, 220–3
Parry, Sir Charles, 251, 299
Pashchenko, 199
Pathetic Symphony (Tchaikovsky), 244
Patti, Adelina, 174
Pavlovna, Grand-Duchess Elena, 119
Pazdirek, *Handbook of Musical Literature*, 8
'Peasant's Lullaby', 10, 63, 95, 255
'Peep-show, The', 4, 9, 11, 118–20
Pelléas et Mélisande, 108, 246, 271, 275
Peri, Jacopo, 91–2
Perof, 125
Peter-and-Paul School, 15, 16
Petrof, 3, 68, 116, 170, 175, 183, 191, 194, 196
Philosophie de la Nature, 45, 57
Pictures from an Exhibition, 4, 11, 14, 76, 182, 199, 259, 264, 297, 301
Pissemsky, Alexeï, 3, 31*n.*, 82, 85
Platonova (singer), 3, 169, 170, 173, 175
Plescheef (poet), 195
Poděbrad, 75–6
Poe, Edgar Allan, 210
Polonaise (*Boris Godunof*), 121–2, 128, 169, 268
Polovtsian Dances (Borodin), 295
Poltava, 199–200
'Porte-Enseigne Polka', 8, 18, 32
Pougin, Arthur, 222
Power of Evil, The (Serof), 170
Prague, 69
'Prayer', 63, 293
'Prelude', 4
'Preludio in modo classico', 8
Preobrajensky Guards, 2, 12, 18, 19
Prince Igor (Borodin), 65, 96, 242
'Promenade', 182, 259, 260, 264
Puccini, Giacomo, 92
Pugachevshchina, 10, 193
Purgold,——(Councillor), 3, 120, 170
Purgold, Alexandra, 3, 106, 155, 169, 170
Purgold, Nadejda, 3, 155, 169
Pushkin, Alexander, 4, 9, 66, 112, 125, 137–8, 142, 165, 168, 176, 193

RAAB, MRS. V., 175
Raabe, Peter, 229
'Ragamuffin, The', 9, 10, 95, 257, 258, 293, 295–6, 298
Rameau, Jean Philippe, 92, 93
Rapoport (critic), 176
Raskol, 85, 118
Ratcliffe (Cui), 96, 116–17, 170, 174
Rauchfus, Dr., 131
Ravel, Maurice Joseph, 237–8, 271, 307
Realism in art, 87–95
Reicha, Joseph, 244
Rembrandt van Ryn, Paul, 87
Repin, Ilya, 125, 129, 133, 134, 135, 205, 207
Requiem (Mozart), 30
Rheingold, 89
Riabinin, Ivan Trofimovitch, 159, 239, 254, 255, 269, 291, 294
Riemann, Hugo, 5–6, 86, 91, 271
Riesemann, Oskar von, 54*n.*, 87*n.*, 137*n.*, 148, 226, 227, 252
Riga, 228
Rimsky-Korsakof, Andreï, 1, 3, 5, 8, 10, 14, 22, 23–4, 29, 33*n.*, 40, 42*n.*, 43, 46, 47, 48, 50, 60, 64–5, 70, 71, 75–8, 82–3, 96, 98–108, 115, 118–23, 136, 148, 150*n.*, 151, 155, 160, 168, 170, 175, 177, 188, 191–3, 196, 199, 202, 204, 206, 210, 213, 254, 255, 261, 302, 307; Folk-Songs of, 240*n.*, 241, 254; Memoirs of, 23, 24, 66, 68, 77–8, 106, 117, 130, 173, 174, 184, 187–9, 196, 198, 205, 208–9, 218; revises Mussorgsky's works, 215–32, 247, 251, 281–3, 291
Rimsky-Korsakof, Nadejda, 19, 112, 115
Rinuccini, Ottavio, 91
Riumin, Mrs., 2
Rogneda (Serof), 64, 76, 119, 174
Rojdestvensky, S., 205
Ropartz, Guy, 7
Rossini, Gioacchino, 174
Rostislav, 184
Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, 92
Rubinstein, Anton, 4, 8, 37, 39, 46, 69, 178, 181, 199
Rubinstein, Nikolaï, 41
'Rude Rascal, The', 4
Ruijneman, Daniel, 97, 233
Rurik, Prince,
Ruslan and Liudmila (Glinka), 20, 69, 117, 162, 174, 178, 180, 181, 282, 295
Russalka (Dargomyjsky), 21, 57
'Russian Five', 50
Russian Musical Gazette, 13, 221
Russian Music Society, 4*n.*, 8, 37, 39, 43, 68, 112, 119, 121, 169, 206
Russian Opera, 224
Russkaya Mysl, 219
Russky Mir, 176
Russky Muzykalny Viestnik, 5, 17

Sadko (Rimsky-Korsakof), 66, 70, 76–8, 104

Sadler's Wells Theatre, 300
Saint Elizabeth, 304
St. John's Night, see *Night on the Bare Mountain.*
St. Petersburg, Conservatoire, 18, 20, 69, 77, 118–19, 210, 217; Grand Theatre, 174; Malo-Yaroslavets Restaurant, 184, 187; Marinsky Theatre, *q.v.*; Musical and Dramatic Amateur Circle, 195; *Musical and Theatrical Messenger*, 37; music in, 20–2, 32*n.*, 41, 68, 69, 76, 79, 217; Mussorgsky's 'community' at, 62; *Peterburgskaya Gazeta*, 170; *Peterburgsky Listok*, 170, 177; *Sankt Peterburgskye Viedomosti*, 171, 177, 178; schools in, 15–16 (*see also* School for Cadets); Pissemsky's influence in, 85; *Voskresny Listok Muzyki*, 8; Wagner concerts at, 59–60
Saint-Saëns, Camille, 220
Salammbô, 8, 9, 11, 50, 56, 60, 62,–3, 67, 68, 81, 95, 112, 166, 193, 259, 260, 286
Samson (Handel), 119
Sand, George, 131
Sariotti (singer), 96, 175
Sarti, Giuseppe, 136
Savelova, Z., 45*n.*, 64
'Savishna', 4, 9, 10, 67, 74, 95, 101, 258, 259, 295–7
Scherzi, 4, 8, 10, 29, 31, 36, 37, 40–5, 50–1, 122, 297
Scherzino, 8, 9, 10
Schönberg, Arnold, 28, 271
School for Cadets of the Guards, 2, 8, 15, 16, 19, 135, 184, 210
Schroeder (singer), 175
Schubert, Franz, 24, 41, 42, 50, 60, 82, 199, 235, 244, 255, 297, 303
Schumann, Robert, 3*n.*, 15, 24, 30, 35–6, 40–2, 50, 60, 82, 104, 199, 235, 244, 271, 282, 288, 297, 303
Séailles, 87
'Seamstress, The', 8, 9
'Seminarist, The', 4, 9, 10, 67, 95, 162, 297, 298
'Serenade', 259
Shakespeare, William, 86, 109, 125, 229
Shaliapin, Feodor, 219
'Shamyl's March', 34
Shebalin, 214
Shestakova, Liudmila, 3, 8, 64–6, 69, 73, 77, 100, 123, 130, 138, 170, 185, 187, 189—91, 194–7, 201, 203
Shevtchenko, Taras, 3, 9, 82, 85
Shilovo, 98
Shilovskaya, Maria, 32, 40, 47
Shilovsky, Stepan, 32, 38, 43
Shiskof (theatrical designer), 176
Shistakof, 28
Siegfried, 263, 274
Smetana, Bedrich, 69
Sobolef (singer), 175
Sokalsky, General, 206
Solovief (critic), 171, 176, 178, 201
Sonata in A flat major (Beethoven), 2, 15, 34*n.*, 38
Sonatas (Mussorgsky), 30, 31, 45
'Song of the Flea', 4, 202
'Song of the Golden Fish' (Balakiref), 297
Songs and Dances of Death, 6, 185, 187, 193, 217, 246, 258, 265, 278
'Song to Georgia' (Balakiref), 297
Sophocles, 8, 28
Sorotchintsi Fair, The, 3, 4, 6, 76, 82, 121, 123, 183, 186, 187, 192, 193, 199, 201, 203, 204, 213–14, 217, 219, 264
'Souvenir d'Enfance', 19, 50
'Sphinx', 259, 278, 297
Spielhagen, Friedrich, 118
Stakheef, 198
Stanford, Sir Charles, 246
Stassof, Dimitri, 1*n.*, 4*n*, 20, 21, 25, 37, 39, 65, 112, 117, 118, 129, 178, 179, 193
Stassof, Vladimir, 1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 15, 17, 20, 21, 24, 25–6, 29, 30, 47, 48, 60, 62, 64, 65–6, 69, 74, 78, 83, 86, 90, 94, 106, 108, 115, 117–30, 132–3, 135, 137, 138, 155, 156, 159–62, 164, 169, 170–3, 176, 178–80, 182, 184–98, 200, 203–4, 207, 208, 216, 224, 227, 232, 235, 259
Stassova, Pauline, 130, 135, 179, 185
Stassovna, Sofia, *see* Fortunato, Sofia
Stassovna, Varvara, *see* Komarova
Stassovna, Zinotchka, 113–14
Stefan, Paul, 227
Stone Guest, The (Dargomyjsky), 22, 82, 94, 96, 108, 111–12, 115–16, 142, 170, 171, 174, 207, 274
'Storm on the Black Sea', 4, 202
Strakhof, 177, 178
Strangways, A. H. Fox, 244
Strasburg library, 4, 5, 7
Strauss, Johann, 89
    Richard, 90, 108, 225
Stravinsky, Igor, 243
Sunday Times, 225
Sunless, 11, 63, 94, 182–3, 185, 186, 187, 226, 259, 260, 262, 265, 269, 272, 278, 279, 281, 292–3, 297, 298, 301, 306
Sutgof, General, 16–17
Symons, Arthur, 224
Symphonie fantastique (Berlioz), 275, 282
Symphony in D major, 40, 41, 43, 51, 57

T *amara* (Balakiref), 28, 294
Taneief, Sergei, 218

Tchaikovsky, Peter Ilytch, 127–8, 178, 218, 225, 240*n.*, 244
Tcherepnin, Alexander, 97, 233
Tcherepnin, Nikolai, 214
Tchernyshevsky, 62
Tchirikof, Ivan, 13
'Tell me, gentle maiden', 8, 31
'Tell me, star', *see* 'Little Star'
Tikhonof, 175
Tikhvin, 8, 30
Tiutchef, B., 2, 13
Tolstoi, Count Alexeï, 4, 193
Tolstoi, Theophilus, 119
Toropets, 2, 13, 57
Totentanz (Liszt), 68
Tovey, Donald, 28, 297
'Trepak', 187, 246, 259, 263, 264, 296, 297, 298, 301
'Triumph of Bacchus, The' (Dargomyjsky), 69
Troitsky, 86
Tsar's Bride, The, 96, 254
Tsarskoë-Selo, 190, 193
Turgenief, Ivan, 3, 82, 85

UGOLINO, VINCENZO, 91
Ulybyshef, 22
'Urchin, The', 71

VANLIARSKY, FEODOR, 2, 19
Vassilief, V. I., 175, 197
V. V., 175, 197
Vecchi, Orazio, 91
'Vecchio Castello, Il', 264
Veliaminof, 106
Verdi, Giuseppe, 174, 225, 235
Verstovsky, 64
Virchow, 86
'Vision', 193
Vital Question, The (Tchernyshevsky), 62
Voevode, The (Ostrovsky), 9
Volodia, 129
Volok, 44–5
Vsiemirnaya Illustratsia, 176

WAGNER, RICHARD, 57, 59, 60, 78, 82, 88, 111, 143, 167, 174, 177, 225, 235, 263, 274, 276, 302, 303
'Wanderer, The', 195
Weber, Carl-Maria von, 225
Weimar, 132
Wellesz, Egon, 227
'Where art thou?', *see* 'Little Star'
'Why do thine eyes reproach me?' 67
'Wild winds blowing', 63, 81, 259, 263, 267, 278, 297, 298
'Witches', *see Night on the Bare Mountain*
'With Nanny', 11, 96, 258, 259, 295
'With the Doll', 9, 11
Wolf, Hugo, 229, 307
Wolfes, Felix, 228
Wolfurt, Kurt von, 137*n.*, 227, 307
Wotton, Tom, 302*n.*
Wozzeck, 271
Wyzewa, T. de, 220

YAKOVLEF, 176, 180
Yalta, 200–2
Yastrebtsef, 216
Years of Youth, 7, 52*n.*, 61, 227
'Yeremushka's Lullaby', 4, 9, 10, 22, 62, 81, 94 96, 101, 231, 257, 296, 297
'You disdain my words of love', 40

ZAREMBA, 119
Zola, Emile, 87
Zveref, 135

INDEX TO MUSIC EXAMPLES

Boris Godunof, 89, 151, 152, 166, 248, 251, 252–3, 263, 267, 268, 273, 274, 276–7, 278–9
  Prologue, scene 1, 144, 145, 248, 258
    scene 2, 239, 283
  Act I, scene 1, 153
    scene 2, 153*n.*
  Act II, 147, 256
  Act III, 249, 281
  Act IV, scene 1, 240, 279, 280
    scene 2, 146, 153*n.*, 154, 303–4

Characters
  Boris, 147–8, 149, 248
  Dimitri, 145
  Pimen, 146, 153, 154, 303–4
  police officers, 150
  Rangoni, 247–8, 263
  Shuisky, 148, 149
  Varlaam, 150
  Xenia, 256

'Death's Lullaby', 267, 277

Finger-prints, 266, 268
'Forgotten', 285

Goethe, song from, 61

'Joyless', 285

'Kallistratushka', 256
Khovanshchina, 79, 89, 262, 268, 276, 280
  Prelude, 250
  Act II, 267
  Act V, 212, 242

'King Saul', 54

Liszt, *Faust* Symphony, 238, 239
  Saint Elizabeth oratorio, 304

Marriage, The, 98, 107, 111, 250, 261

'Night', 269
Night on the Bare Mountain, 71, 72

'Polonaise', 268
'Prayer', 250

Ravel, Sonata for violin and 'cello, 237
Rimsky-Korsakof, *A Hundred Russian Folk-Songs*, 240*n.*
  Adaptation of *Boris Godunof*, 282, 283
  Adaptation of 'Trepak', 247
Russian folk-tunes, 238, 240, 241, 242, 243

Scherzo in C sharp minor, 51
Serof, *Judith*, 58
Sunless, No. 3, 269
  No. 6, 249, 272, 275

'Trepak', 246, 247, 273, 275

Wagner, *Siegfried*, Act 1, 275
'Where art thou, little star', 52–3
'Wild winds blowing', 247

'Yeremushka', 296

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